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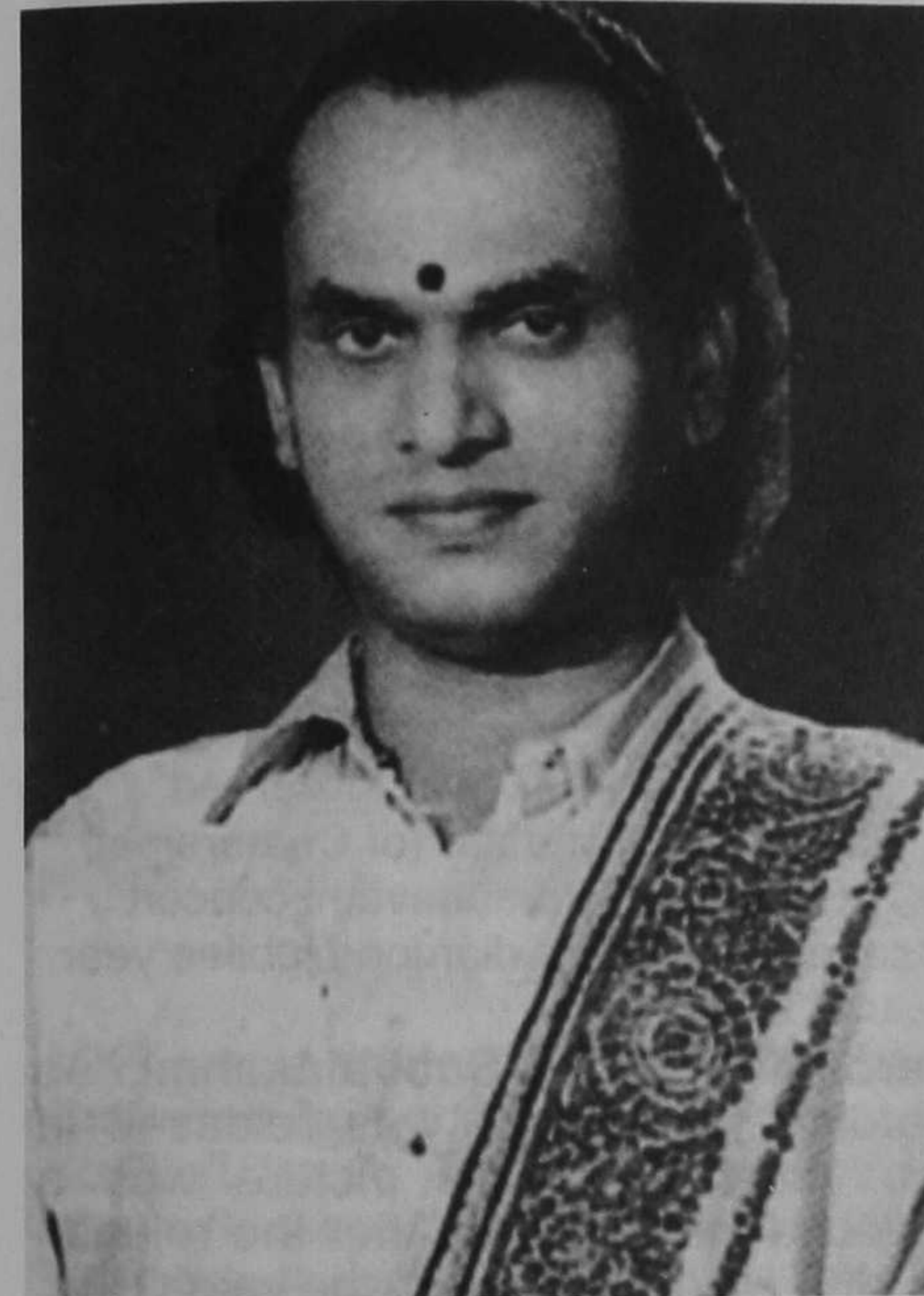
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## INFOCUS

What's in a birthday? The excitement one used to feel as a child with a birthday approaching starts waning and celebrations get whittled down more and more as one grows older, till it comes to pass that one actually starts wishing away birthdays! The job of editing a cultural journal wherein one frequently reads and writes about great personalities past and present, makes one realize the importance of these landmarks especially the major ones like centenaries. These are really opportunities for us to recall their achievements, ruminate on their lives and take something out of their experiences. This quarter we commemorate the centenary of a legendary singer, a matinee idol of Tamil movie audiences and heart throb of the masses and classes alike in the 1930s and 40s, M.K. Thyagaraja Bagavather. D.V. Balakrishnan, an ardent fan of the legend pays tribute. A. Seshan delves more into the topic of pathantaram in *The Transformation of Traditional Pathantaram*. We're bereaved by the loss of a great vainika and scholar Vidya Shankar in June, Sivapriya Krishnan pays tribute. A new experiment with melakarta ragas has been attempted by Nallan Chakravarthy Murthy and he writes on the results in *New Varnams in 72 Melakartas*. Nalini Dinesh interviews vocalist S. Sowmya. Dr. Sakuntala Narasimhan gives numerous examples of religious tolerance and harmony in *Building Musical Bridges-The Hindustani Experience*. Dr. P.N. Prabhavathy describes a unique musical ritual of Kerala, Brahmanippattu in an article. P.P. Ramachandran pays tribute to Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu. P.R. Mohun reviews the recently-released book of Suresh Balakrishnan, *Bagavather-His Life and Times*. Nalini Dinesh and Jyothi Mohan report on the sabha concerts and happenings at the vidyalaya. □

## M. K. Thyagaraja Bagavather(1910-1951) – A Centenary Tribute

by D.V. Balakrishnan



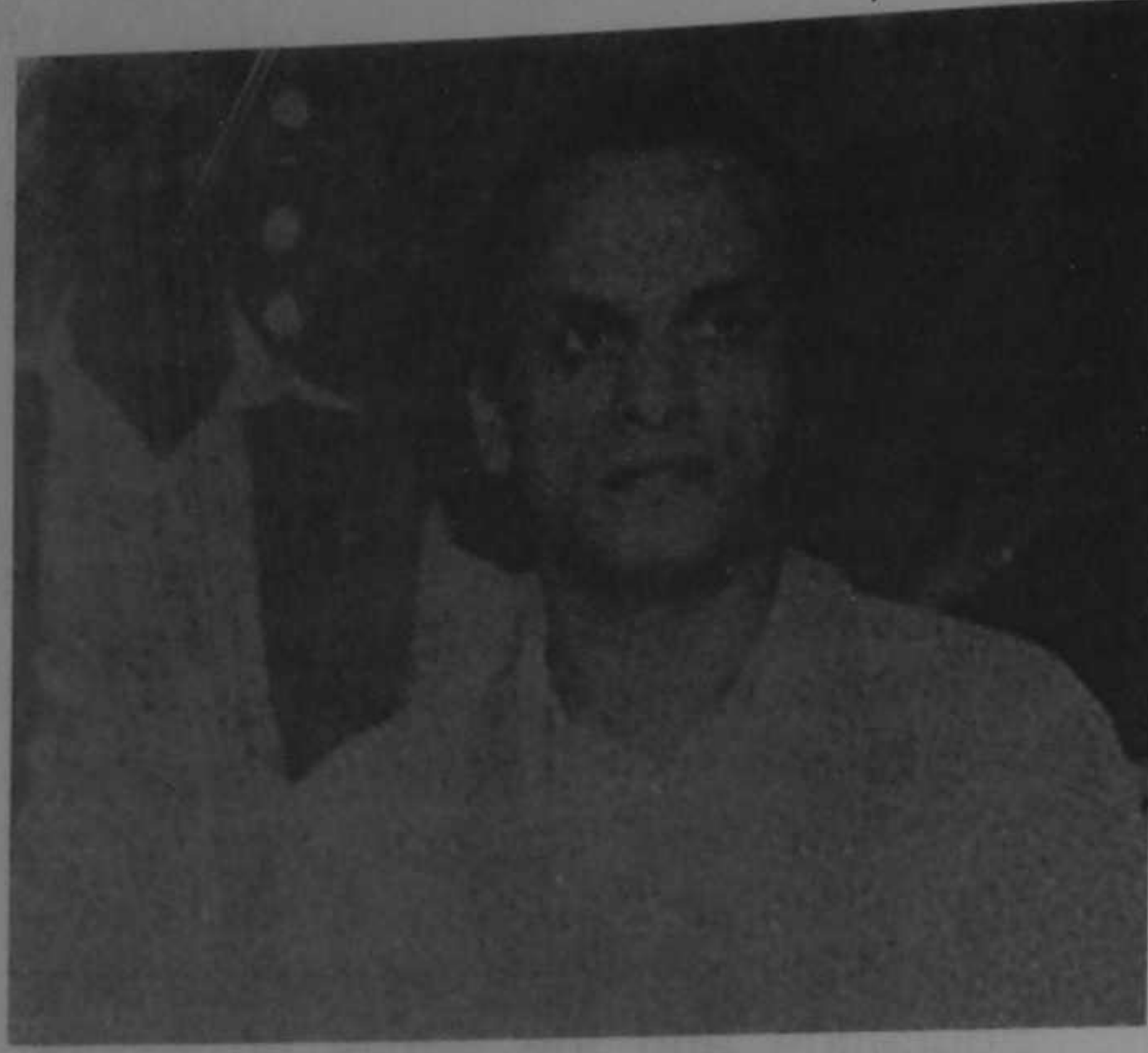
M.K. Thyagaraja Bagavather (1910-1951)

A hundred years ago a legend was born and even fifty years after his demise he is remembered by his fans and music lovers. They still think that nobody can match the depth of his voice and it cannot even be copied by anybody. This legendary singer is none other than M.K. Thyagaraja Bagavather. Bagavather's honey-dew voice is distinctly different from others and it had wide range, high pitch, flexibility and speed which traversed the octaves effortlessly to the utter delight of millions.

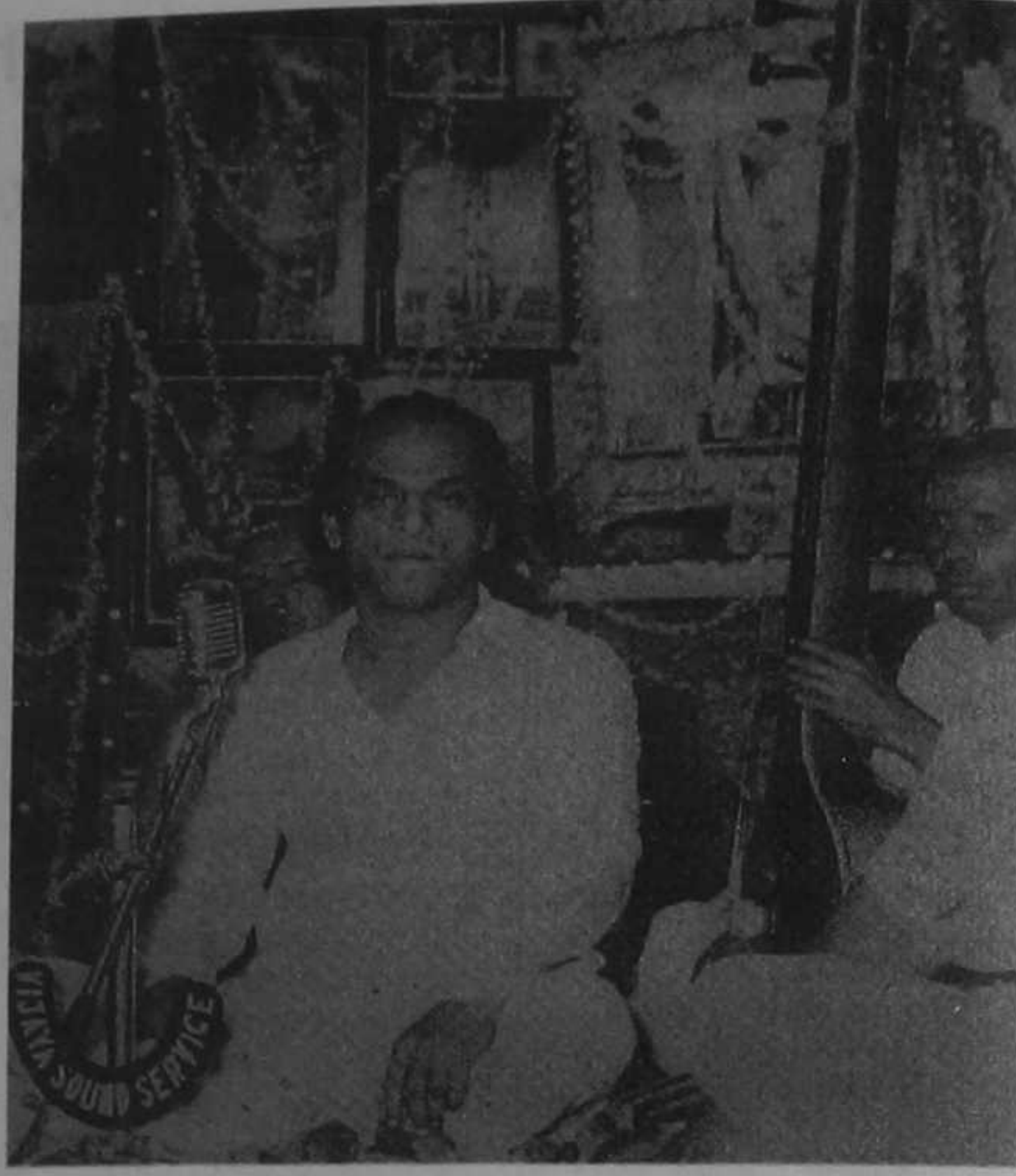
M.K. Thyagaraja Bagavather, a legend in his lifetime was born on 01.03.1910 in Tanjavor as the eldest son of Sri M.

Krishnamurthy. Sri M. Krishnamurthy belonged to a family of Vishwakarma whose main profession was to make gold ornaments. Thyagaraja Bagavather affectionately called as MKT was born in a very poor family. He was blessed with a powerful voice. His father wanted to give him good education and training in his family profession of making gold ornaments. Education and the family profession never attracted the young Thyagarajan. His attention was drawn towards singing. Though his father himself was a good singer and participated in many bhajans, he never wanted his son to take up a profession in singing. But fate and destiny had other ideas. Soon his exceptional singing talent was spotted by Mr. F.G. Natesa Iyer, a railway employee at Trichy who was running a drama troupe called Trichy Rasika Ranjani Sabha. MKT at the age of 10 was brought to the drama stage to act as "Lohidasa".

His singing ability and acting skills made him a child super star over night. Mr. Ponnu Iyengar, a Carnatic musician and violinist happened to hear the exceptional singing ability of young Thyagarajan in the drama Harichandra as Lohidasan. He was spell-bound on hearing young Thyagarajan's songs. He immediately offered to teach young Thyagarajan Carnatic music free of cost. His training went on for six years and MKT's first classical Carnatic concert took place at the age of 16 at Trichy. After hearing his classical Carnatic music for three hours, the audience came to the conclusion that MKT excelled in this form of art also.



MKT performing at Fort High School in Bangalore in 1952



MKT performing in the Shree Ramaseva Mandali's (of Chamrajpet, Bangalore) Ramanavami concert series in 1949, its diamond jubilee year

At the age of 18 he became the hero in stage plays and his stage plays became very popular all over south India, Ceylon etc. He was considered equal to S.G.Kittappa the king of Tamil stage plays. After hearing of MKT's immense popularity in stage plays, S.G. Kittappa decided to visit one of MKT's stage plays at Tirunelveli. Deft handling of all the songs in pure classical Carnatic ragas especially the raga Kharaharapriya in the drama by MKT drew the attention of S.G. Kittappa and he asked for repeated encores.

This gave MKT immense prestige. At the end of the drama, S.G. Kittappa came to the stage and showered lavish praise on MKT's ability. Simultaneously MKT was also involved in giving classical Carnatic concerts. When one of his stage plays was staged at Karaikudi, a rich zamindar from Chettinad and Sri K. Subramaniam, a pioneer film director, happened to see the drama. Impressed by the singing and acting ability of MKT and heroine S.D.Subbalakshmi, the zamindar and K. Subramaniam decided to film the stage play "Pavalakkodi" with MKT as

hero and S.D. Subbalakshmi as heroine. The picture was released in the year 1934. This picture was a stupendous success. After the release of MKT's *Chinthamani* in the year 1937, MKT became the first super star of the Tamil silver screen. This was the first picture to run over one year. MKT's dramas, films and Carnatic concerts drew unparalleled and unprecedented crowd all over south India and in Ceylon. His *Haridass* released in 1944 ran for well over 3 years continuously.

He became a charismatic personality and singing sensation. A firm supporter of India's independence, he included a Mahakavi Bharathiar song *Sollu Pappa* in his film "Satya Seelan" (1936). His film "Thiruneelakandar" (1939) was a golden jubilee hit. He invited the great Congress leader Mr. Sathyamurthy for the golden jubilee function. Praising sky high the ability of MKT, Mr. Sathyamurthy put forth a request to MKT to wear khadi. Since MKT had

highest regards for Mr. Sathyamurthy he immediately honoured his words and started wearing khadi throughout his life time.

Towards the end of the '30s he learnt Carnatic music from Alathur Venkatesa Iyer and Alathur brothers. He was a regular singer in Trichy All India Radio with "A" Grade rating.



Alathur Brothers

MKT was a student of Alathur brothers. But when he became busy in films, he couldn't go to Trichy to continue his music lessons. So he urged Alathur brothers to come to Madras and he rented a house for them in Aravamudhu Gardens which is a small lane off Poonamallee High road, next to Dasaprakash Hotel.

In early '40's MKT became a keen supporter of Tamil Isai movement.



MKT performing at the first Tamil Isai Conference in 1943.

He was a much sought after Carnatic musician and was one among the galaxy of musicians who sang in Tamil Isai Sangam. He was at the height of his glory and had the world at his feet. He was considered a demi god.



MKT with M.M. Dandapani Desikar at the Tamil Isai festival in Annamalai University in 1944

### கர்நாடக சங்கீத கச்சேரிகளில் பாகவதர் பாடிய கீர்த்தனைகள்

1. ஸாதிஞ்சனே
2. ஏதாவுனரா
3. சலமேலரா
4. உபசாரமு
5. அபராம பக்தி
6. ராஜு வெடல
7. ஸாமஜ வரகமனா
8. நாத தனுமனிஸம்

ஆரபி  
கல்யாணி  
மார்க ஹிந்தோளம்  
பைரவி  
பந்துவராளி  
தோடி  
ஹிந்தோளம்  
சித்தரஞ்சனி

தியாகையர்  
தியாகையர்  
தியாகையர்  
தியாகையர்  
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தியாகையர்  
தியாகையர்  
தியாகையர்

9. ஓரஜுபு	கன்னடகௌள	தியாகைய்யர்
10. பராகு நீகேலரா	கிரணாவளி	தியாகைய்யர்
11. தெலிஸிராம	பூர்ணசந்த்ரிகா	தியாகைய்யர்
12. நாதோபாசன	பேகட	தியாகைய்யர்
13. சுகிளவரோ	கானடா	தியாகைய்யர்
14. பக்கலநிலபடி	கரஹரப்ரியா	தியாகைய்யர்
15. நேநெந்து வெதகுதுரா	ஹரிகாம்போதி	தியாகைய்யர்
16. எவரிகிஅவதார	தேவமனோஹரி	தியாகைய்யர்
17. பூர்ஸரஸ்வதி	ஆரபி	தீக்ஷிதர்
18. பாலகோபால	பைரவி	தீக்ஷிதர்
19. சேதஸ்ரி	த்விஜாவந்தி	தீக்ஷிதர்
20. பூர்வரலஷ்மி	பூர்	தீக்ஷிதர்
21. மாமவ பட்டாபிராமா	மணிரங்கு	தீக்ஷிதர்
22. ஸரஸிஜனாபலோதரி	நாககாந்தாரி	தீக்ஷிதர்
23. மஹாலிங்கேஸ்வரம்	பரஸ்	தீக்ஷிதர்
24. பஞ்சாஷ்ட்பீடரூபிணி	கர்நாடக தேவ காந்தாரி	தீக்ஷிதர்
25. பூர்மாத்ருபூதம்	கன்னட	தீக்ஷிதர்
26. வீரஹனுமதே	கானடா	தீக்ஷிதர்
27. தாமதத் திருவிளையாடல்	—	சுத்தானந்தபாரதி
28. அபயம் கொடுத்தருள் அம்மையப்பா	பைரவி	சுத்தானந்தபாரதி
29. ஆத்மபரிபூரணம்	ரத்னாங்கி	சுத்தானந்த பாரதி
30. ஸரஸ்ரஹாஸனப்ரியே	நாட்டை	புலியூர் துரைசாமி ஐயர்
31. பரமாத்மனைப்பாட	பரஸ்	திருவத்தியூர் தியாகராஜன்
32. ஜெகமதிலே	சாருகேசி	நடராஜ சுந்தரம்பிள்ளை
33. ராரா ராஜீவ	மோஹனம்	மைகூர் வாசுதேவாசார்
34. கருணாநிதே	காம்போதி	கர்ப்புரிவாசர்
35. நானேநம்பி	கல்யாணி	கர்ப்புரிவாசர்
36. வடிவழகா	கன்னட கௌள	சரவணபவாநந்தா
37. காயெல்லாம்	ராகமாலிகை (நீலாம்பரி, மோஹனம், சஹானா, காபி, அடாணா)	சரவணபவாநந்தா
38. ஏழை எமது	அடாணா	சரவணபவாநந்தா
39. நாயர் பக்ஷிமடி	ராகமாலிகை (செஞ்சுருட்டி, சஹானா, குந்தலவராளி)	சரவணபவாநந்தா
40. செய்யாத தொழில்	சரஸ்வதி	மாயவரம் வேதநாயகம் பிள்ளை
41. நடனம் ஆடினார்	வசந்தா	கோபாலகிருஷ்ணபாரதி
42. நீ இரங்காளனில்	அடாணா	சிவன்

43. சிவசிதம்பரம்	கல்யாணி	சிவன்
44. சிவகாமசுந்தரி	முகாரி	சிவன்
45. பராசக்தி ஜெனனி	ஹம்ஸத்வனி	சிவன்
46. என்ன அதிசயமோ	ஸரஸ்வதி	சிவன்
47. ஆடியபாதம்	காம்போதி	சிவன்
48. தலைவாரிபூசூடி	சிந்துபைரவி	பாரதிதாசன்
49. சரவணபவசமயமிதிரா	பசுபதிப்ரியா	ஹரிகேசநல்லூர் முத்தையா பாகவதர்
50. ஆதியோபரஞ்சோதி	—	—

His film songs were great because they had spiritual content and superb music and he did launch hundreds of 78 rpms. For instance, his *Soppana Vazhvil* (happy in this dream life), which MKT sang in Siva Kavi, has philosophical depth and is worthy, like many other Sivan cinema songs, of inclusion in the classical repertoire. Purists, hang onto your shirts! A major composition is a major composition.



Listening to a Singing Star - Papanasam Sivan at a concert given by MKT during celebrations in honour of the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of the composer.

MKT worshipped the Naada Brahman and remained a student throughout his life. He understood the meaning and import of the lyrics he sang. He had a perfect sense of shruti and laya and deep lakshya gnaanam (knowledge gained by listening to music). He respected his accompanists and seniors and had immense faith in his own ability.

At this point of time destiny had other ideas about the future of MKT. He was unnecessarily implicated in the Lakshmi Kanthan murder case with the result the innocent MKT had to be in prison from end of 1944 to 25<sup>th</sup> April 1947.

Sri M. Bakthavatsalam, Minister of Tamil Nadu State, holding the portfolio of police department during 1949, conferred on MKT the title "Gandharva Gaana Ratna Sapphaswara Visharadha" in 1949 for his classical Carnatic concert. MKT had very great respect for Kamaraj and Rajaji and was

MKT was deeply devoted to Lord Muruga. After his release from prison, while performing in the temple town of Palani, he is said to have announced that his imprisonment happened because of him having forgotten Lord Muruga. On his release, he visited temples like Samayapuram and Palani.

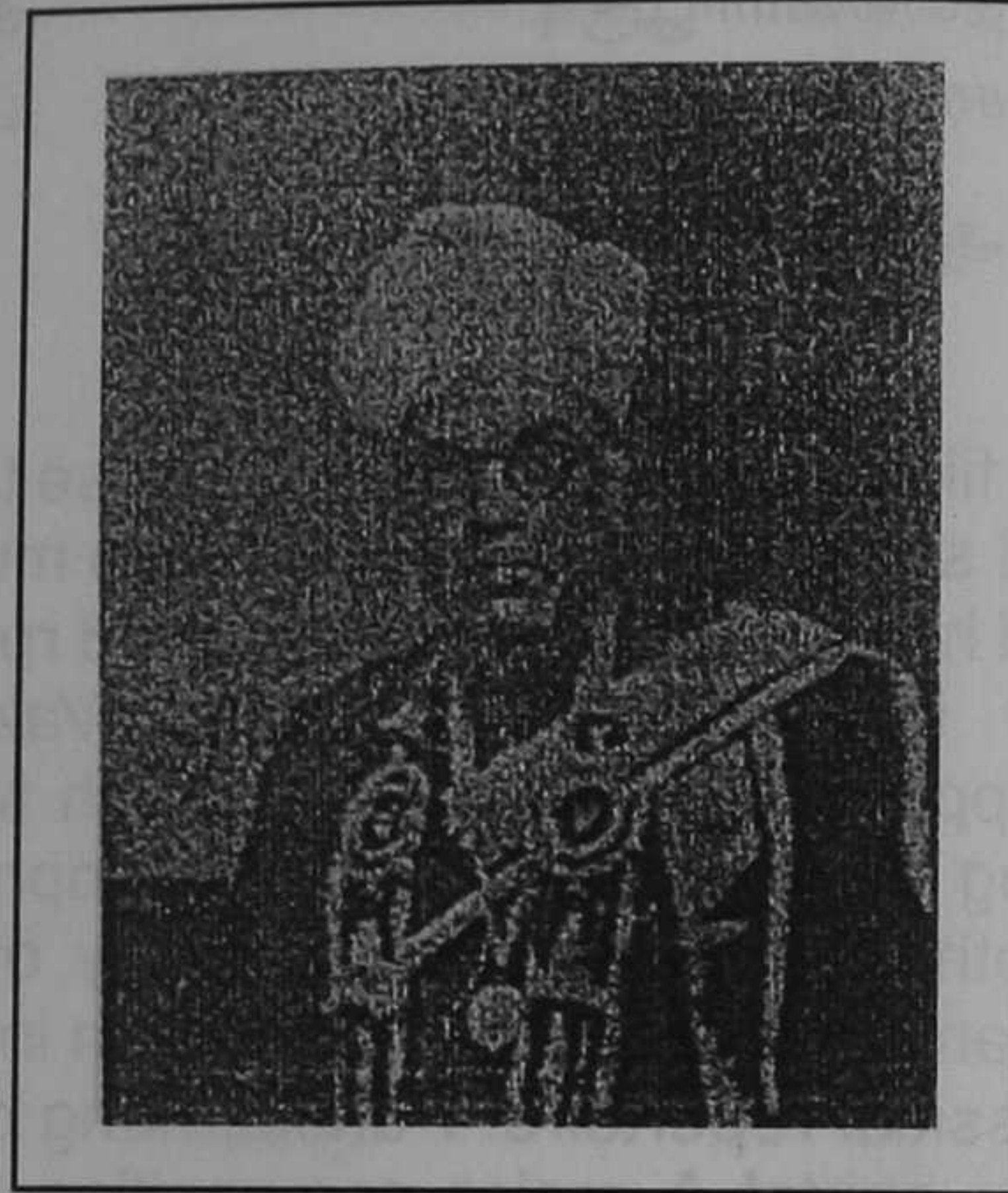
## Late T. L. Venkatarama Iyer

by  
**T. SANKARAN**  
 (Director, Tamil Isai Kalloori, Madras)

Sangeeta Kalanidhi T. L. Venkatarama Iyer whose death occurred on January 2 was a musician's musician whose first love was music, although he was a lawyer by profession. His enthusiasm for music, particularly the compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar, was intense and almost infectious. He had learnt many Dikshitar pieces directly from Ambi Dikshitar. But for the missionary zeal of Venkatarama Iyer several of them would not have seen the light of day. He was not of the arm-chair variety but could quote chapter and verse from classical sangeeta literature and illustrate them profusely singing some lesser known compositions.

The credit for popularising the Navavarana kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar and the kritis propitiating Raahu and Ketu in the Navagraha series should belong to him entirely.

One particular incident in this connection is worth recalling. He had come to the Trichy Station of All India Radio to record for the first time the Navavarana kritis and incidentally



he happened to discuss the merits of musicians who were steeped in the tradition of Dikshitar. Suddenly he made a request that he should be enabled to meet M. K. Thyagaraja Bagavather who was at that time at the height of his fame as a film star! Mr. Venkatarama Iyer had just then listened to one of Bagavather's broadcasts and carefully made a note of a kriti in Nagagandhari with which Mr Iyer was not familiar. He wanted the text and notation for the kriti should it be difficult for him to meet Bagavather immediately.

first prime minister of India Sri Nehru visited Trichy along with Sri Kamaraj Nadar. MKT made a request to Sri Kamaraj Nadar to bring Nehru to his residence at Trichy cantonment which was named as "Ananda Bavanam". Sri Nehru's residence at Allahabad was named as Ananda Bhavan which

very close to them also. Despite knowing many political leaders personally, he never identified himself with any political party. But he had very great respect for Congress leaders of his time.

Immediately after independence the

inspired and attracted MKT very much and hence the name for his house. Since a visit to MKT's house was not in the agenda, Sri Kamaraj Nadar expressed his inability to accede to MKT's request. Sri Nehru's affection towards children was a well known fact. MKT took this to his advantage and paraded all the children from the nearby school at his residence and ordered them to sing "Jana Gana Mana" when Nehru's car was just crossing MKT's residence. Nehru, seeing the school children singing the song immediately entered MKT's residence and paid his respect to the song. Utilizing this golden opportunity MKT garlanded Nehru. Coming to know of the immense popularity of MKT, Nehru informed Kamaraj Nadar to bring MKT to the Congress party. When Kamaraj Nadar expressed the desire of Nehru to MKT, MKT politely turned down the offer

stating that his knowledge in politics was almost zero. When Gandhiji died in the year 1948 he gave two gramophone records in praise of Gandhiji, *Gandhiaippol* and *Kaimaru Saivathundo*. These records witnessed record sales. Later on he also sang two patriotic songs *Sudantherakkodi* and *Parukkullay Nalla Nadu*. He also performed a concert and collected a large amount to help nationalist poet Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai. He gave a very big party at his residence to those Congress workers from Trichy who participated in the "Salt Sathyagraha" movement. A kind-hearted person, he helped the drama troupe members and actors of NSK Nataka Mandram after the demise of N.S. Krishnan. MKT has seen manifold achievements and lived as a multifaceted personality. Though he lived only upto 01.11.1959, he is still the hero of many of his fans.

□

Read

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## The Transformation of Traditional Pathantaram

by A. Seshan

Pathantaram is received knowledge in the tradition of guru-sishya parampara. It refers to the totality of a kriti in all its characteristics or properties or lakshana in relation to the sahitya, mettu, pronunciation, swaras of the raga, emphasis, etc., in a holistic and integrated manner passed on in the oral tradition over the centuries from guru to sishya. Just as in Hindustani music the characteristics of gharanas are zealously guarded by their musician-followers, in Carnatic music a vidwan generally has an absolute loyalty to what he learnt from his teacher. If anyone questions him on any aspect of music the standard reply is: "This is what my teacher taught me". Such an attitude often leads to varying versions of the same kriti, raga, etc., between artistes. In matters of music there is no question of right or wrong so long as there is an adherence to sruti and laya and there is ranjakatwa. This is particularly so because many classic treatises on Indian music give different pictures of ragas. It is quite possible that lakshana follows lakshya as much as it is the other way round. In other words, certain ragas might have had certain features in the past but might have undergone changes later. The authors of music treatises of the latter period might have been guided by the existing practice.

One of the subjects of controversies in Carnatic music is the trend in changing the ragas of known kritis highlighted by many writers in music magazines. For the conservative-minded rasika or musician, the original raga, as visualized by the vaggeyakara or the tunesmith, is sacrosanct and a part of

pathantara. Perhaps the first major controversy in this area was Tyagaraja's Chetulara. Kharaharapriya and Bhairavi are the ragas associated with this kriti. In fact the problem of changes in the melodies was felt perhaps starting with the compositions of Tyagaraja, as there is no way of finding the original ragas of the kritis of their predecessors like Purandaradasa. Even though many kritis of Annamacharya have the ragamudras some of the ragas mentioned therein are unknown now. What we hear is the inspired tune-setting by contemporary musicians well-versed in the art. An exception may be the panns of Tevarams passed on by Oduvars from generation to generation in the oral tradition. Manickavasagar's Tiruvachakam has been sung in Mohanam for ages. The modification of pathantaram could be not only in ragas but also in the swaras used therein. There is a third case of both the raga and the swaras remaining the same but the mode of rendition changing. Finally, the structure of the sahitya itself may differ from source to source. All these cases are dealt with below.

**Changes in ragas:** Eventually the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. If the raga is catchy, it stays on even if it is not the same as the original. One classic instance is *Yaro ivar yaro* of Arunachala Kavi. According to the Mudikondan school, the original raga was Saveri. Ariyakudi changed it to Bhairavi and now one hears the song in that raga only. I had an occasion to hear the Saveri version sung by a leading disciple of Mudikondan

Venkatarama Iyer. Somehow it just did not click with me. Probably it has something to do with the feeling of curiosity inherent in the song. It is brought out better by Bhairavi than Saveri.

There is one case where an entire suite of songs was transformed into a different set of ragas. Tiruppavai, a collection of notated songs of Andal, has been edited by V.S Parthasarathy Iyengar and published by Kalai Arangam, Chennai. (The following paras on the book are extracts from a review of this writer, published in Triveni, July-September 1999). The songs are in ragas different from what one has been hearing in concerts for a long time. In the fifties of the last century, the trustees of the Andal Temple in Srivilliputtur in Tamil Nadu requested the late Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, the then doyen of Carnatic music, to set the saint-bard's lyrics to music. Obviously they were not aware of the traditional rendition already existing but not followed and almost forgotten. All these years the musicians have been following the varnamettus set by Ariyakudi. It appears that there had been another musical version, brought out by Shri Chetalur Krishnamachari around 1907, which, it was claimed, was based on the traditional way of singing Tiruppavai. Parthasarathy Iyengar followed this version mostly in twenty out of the thirty songs in the publication. In the case of ten, he changed the ragas in order to avoid repetition. Thus he attempted the revival of an earlier tradition in the rendition of Tiruppavai.

The ragas of *Tiruppavai* in the publication are different from those of Ariyakudi's as could be seen from a sample of the more popular of the hymns.

Song	Ariyakudi	Parthasarathy
Margazhi	Nattai	Bilahari
Mayanai	Sri	Todi
Thoomani	Hamir Kalyani	Mohanam
Orutti makanai	Behag	Sankarabharanam
Male Manivanna	Kuntalavarali	Arabhi
Vangak kadal	Surati	Surati

There is a saying: "Adi Natta, Antya Surata." ("Start with Nattai and end with Surati.") This is the principle Ariyakudi followed for the first and the last songs of *Tiruppavai*, viz., *Margazhi* and *Vangak kadal*. In the Parthasarathy version Surati is retained for the last song but Bilahari takes the place of Nattai for the first lyric. This raga is also appropriate for two reasons. My guru, the late Veenai Vidwan Shri Devakottai Narayana Iyengar, used to say that ragas with *antara gandhara* are suitable for beginning a concert as they impart a certain tempo. Like Nattai, Bilahari also has *antara gandhara* in its *swaras*. The song calls the gopis to hurry up for their morning baths. It is appropriate to set it to a morning *raga* like Bilahari. The songs in the Parthasarathy version are in different *talas*, some with *eduppus* (starting points) other than from *sama*. All the 30 songs are meant to be sung one after the other in the morning in the month of *Margasirsa*. One could speculate whether Ariyakudi would have undertaken to prepare the varnamettus for *Tiruppavai* had he known that they were already in existence. Carnatic music is, however, richer by the availability of two versions of rendering Andal's immortal lyrics.

At my request, Shri Srinivasan Rangaswami, the publisher of the Andal volume, sent me a couple of cassettes containing the rendering of all the songs by a group of students of the late Ramapriya Rangaswami, who had learnt them from Shri Parthasarathy Iyengar himself. The concert was

held in the Indian Fine Arts Society during the Music Festival in Chennai in December 1998. It won an Award in the category of 'best devotional music'. Normally, when one is used to hearing songs in one set of melodies it becomes a little difficult to appreciate them, if rendered in a different manner. In this instance, the flow of songs in the concert was smooth and one hardly remembered the difference between it and the way the songs had been rendered in recent times under the Ariyakudi paddhati. The musical enjoyment was complete.

The changing of ragas is not confined to kritis alone. They extend to light items like bhajans also. MS's rendering of *Vaishnava janato* is mellifluous in a raga which seems to be not known to anyone! I have made enquiries with many knowledgeable persons, including classical and bhajan singers of the two systems of Indian classical music, but have not been successful. Can some reader enlighten me on this? To me it sounds like a melody belonging to the Malhar group of ragas but I would not like to venture a guess for the following reason. The Hindustani system has mitra ragas that are notorious for being close to each other, the difference often being one between Tweedledum and Tweedledee. For every straight raga there appears to be a hybrid one with the introduction of a foreign note. This licence encourages musicians to create new ragas, sometimes named after politicians! I understand that there are nearly half a dozen types of Bageshri of which one is *Suddha Bageshri*, the equivalent of Carnatic *Sriranjani*. It requires a sharp ear and sound swaragnana to find out the differences between mitra ragas. The raga in MS's version appears to be a *misra* type with notes from different

melodies. We in the South also have the upanga - bhashanga differentiation but we do not commit the excesses of the northerners in introducing alien notes in a raga. Lata Mangeshkar has sung the song beautifully in *Khamaj*. On the other hand, Vani Jairam learnt, perhaps, what is the original or authentic version from the Gujarati sources (Narsi Mehta, the composer, was a Gujarati). Meera's *Jo tum todo piya* was tuned to *Bhairavi* by Vasant Desai and sung by Lata in *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje* and was a hit. But Ravi Shankar changed it to *Yaman* in Gulzar's *Meera* and it was sung melodiously by Vani Jairam in the movie, the LP of which was one of the best sellers of the time. Vani's rendering in chaste classical *Yaman* was achieved easily by her as she had had her training under Ustad Abdul Rehman Khan of the Patiala gharana.

There is one song the raga of which has been changed by the same singer. D K Pattammal used to sing Bharatiyar's *Parukkulle nalla nadu* in *Jonpuri* in the past. She and Nithyasree switched it over to *Valaji*, which is equally attractive and pleasant to hear. *Kanden kanden Sitayai* of Arunachala Kavi is reported to have been composed in *Vasanta*. But the runaway success of Kunnakkudi Venkatarama Iyer's version in the 78 rpm record of the 1940s has established *Bageswari* as the raga. The joy and exhilaration of Hanuman on conveying to Rama the news about the discovery of Sita in *Asoka Vana* is brought out better by *Bageswari* than *Vasanta*.

**Change in swaras:** Is *Maye* of Dikshitar in *Tarangini* or *Sudhatarangini*? The controversy is never ending. It is sung in *Tarangini* nowadays, as endorsed by Subbarama Dikshitar in *Sangita*

*Sampradaya Pradarsini*, while *Sudhatarangini* is the *ragamudra*. In the last century *chatusruti dhaivatam* successfully replaced *suddha dhaivatam* and the modified version became popular thanks to Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. The change in swaras is tantamount to a change in the parent ragas. *Tarangini* is a *janya* of *Charukesi* and *Sudhatarangini* belongs to the *Harikambhoji* group. At the discussions of the twenty-fifth conference of the Experts' Committee of the Music Academy, Madras, in 1952 the following resolution was passed: "Tarangini now sung appears to be like *Chenchurutti* in the 28<sup>th</sup> mela; it should be *Janya* of *Charukesi* and should have *Suddha Dhaivata*."

Another notable instance of change of swaras is Tyagaraja's *Nagumomu* in *Abheri*. According to the ancient tradition, it was sung with *suddha dhaivatam*. But sometime around the first quarter of the last century it became *chatusruti dhaivatam*. Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer's lecture-demonstrations used to be broadcast over All India Radio, Madras (now Chennai), for 30 minutes once a week in the morning in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. I can distinctly recall one of his lectures pointing out the change in *Abheri* and then his singing both the versions. The impression still remains in my mind that the earlier version was not as attractive as the modified one. *Bhimpalas*, Hindustani raga, became popular in the South after the release of the film "*Ram Rajya*" (1943) starring Prem Adib and Shobhana Samarth where Saraswati Rane sang "*Beena Madhur Madhur*" in that raga. The record of the song was blared from every street

corner in Madurai, my home town, although the people did not understand the language. The melody was just captivating. It is the influence of *Bhimpalas* that has perpetuated the use of *chatusruti dhaivatam* in *Abheri*. Writing in 1956 B Subba Rao said: "The present tendency in the South is to make *Nagumomu Ganaleni* even more *Bhimpalas*-like than those who introduced the style." (*Raganidhi*, Vol I)

*Paras* is generally accepted as a raga with *suddha madhyamam*, *Mayamalavagaulai* being the *janaka* raga. But in the *Dhanammal* school, *prati madhyamam* replaces the *suddha* variety. When Brinda taught *Dharmapuri Subbarayar's javali Smarasundaranguni* to Semmangudi she laid the condition that if he ever sang that song in a concert he should use only *prati madhyamam* and not bring in *suddha madhyamam* on the ground that it was the correct swara of the raga! Semmangudi followed this instruction although musicologists had questioned its appropriateness (*Sruti* June 2007).

Yet another instance of the transmutation of swaras without a change in the raga is the case of *Khamas*. Traditionally its *nishadam* had been *kaishiki*. But the composers of *javalis* like *Dharmapuri Subbarayar* replaced it with *kakali nishadam*. *Vasudavachar's Brochevarevarura* put a seal of approval on this practice of using *kakali nishadam*, a foreign note, making it a *bhashanga* raga. The *kriti* has become one of the most popular songs in the post-Trinity era. But Tyagaraja and Dikshitar treated the raga as *upanga*. Their *Khamas kritis* are equally popular. So what is the correct

practice? The golden mean is to use kakali nishada for Vasudevachar and javalis and avoid it for Tyagaraja and Dikshitar. It may be called the cafeteria approach! Eventually one finds that the controversies on individual swaras are often fruitless. A good illustration is that of Begada and a story associated with it. Going back to the last century there was an episode involving Tiger Varadachariar and relating to the Experts' Discussion in the mornings at the Music Academy during the December music festival in Chennai (then called Madras). A heated discussion was going on about Begada. The point at issue was whether kakali nishada or kaisiki nishada should be used. The basic question related to the parent Melakarta raga. Was Begada a janya of Dheerasankarabharanam or Harikambhoji? The two opposing sides of equally eminent musicians were passionately arguing about the subject. Enter the Tiger. He enquired as to what was going on. He was informed of the contentious issue and was requested to give his views. He cleared his throat and just sang the raga without saying anything. In his brilliant rendition of Begada neither *nishada* featured! It settled the matter in a conclusive manner exposing the futility of such controversies in Carnatic music. (See "On Appreciating Carnatic Music", *Shanmukha*, July-October 2002). It also demonstrates the fact that in Carnatic music characteristic phrases and gamakas establish the identity of a raga rather than arohana and avarohana.

**Change in mode of rendition:** There are also instances where the ragas and swaras have not changed but the mode

of rendition has. One outstanding example is Syama Sastri's piece in Gowlipantu (*Tarunam idamma*). This rare kriti, arguably the only one composed by him in Tamil, was unveiled to the Carnatic music world by D K Pattammal in the AIR National Programme concert in 1962 arranged to commemorate the bicentennial of his birth. She sang it in a manner reminiscent of Tyagaraja's *Teratiyagarada* in the same raga. There are many instances of the kritis of the Trinity with varnamettus resembling each other's. It was perhaps a tribute which each wanted to pay to the other. But DKP changed the mode of rendition subsequently. The tempo was faster than before. I would rather prefer the earlier slower version as it brought out in a better manner the *bhakti bhava* of the *marjala kichora nyayam*, i.e., being protected like a weak kitten picked up gently by its mother in its mouth, unlike the monkey-like *markata kichora nyayam*, the *bhakta* clinging to the Lord through his own effort.

### Variations in Structure

A classic case of different pathantaras in existence in relation to the structure of the sahitya itself is that of Tyagaraja's pancharatna kritis. I have written in detail on this subject elsewhere. The following table is one illustrative example of the variations in the versions published in some standard books.

With the exception of Varali, not only the number of charanams in each kriti but even the one in which the vaggeyakara's mudra appears differ from author to author. This is purely a

### Variations in Pathantaram of Pancharatna Kritis of Tyagaraja

Raga of Kriti	Total No. of Charanams			Sl. No. of Mudra Charanams		
	Author			Author		
	RR	CR & VR	SD	RR	CR & VR	SD
Nata	10	*	9	7,8,10	*	3,6,9
Gaula	10	10	9	10	10	9
Arabhi	9	8	7	7&9@	@	@
Varali	8	8	*	8	8	*
Sri	10	10	9	9&10	10	9

\* = Not included  
 @ = The vaggeyakara mudra is in the expanded version of the first charanam, namely, "Samayaniki" sung at the end of the Arabhi kriti  
 RR = R. Rangaramanuja Iyengar, Sree Kriti Mani Malai, Vol I, IV Edition  
 CR & VR = C. Ramanujachari & V. Raghavan, The Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja, I Edition  
 SD = Subbarama Dikshitar, Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini, Part V, I Edition. He refers to the kritis as swara-sahityams and not Pancharatnas. Probably the latter expression was not in existence in his time (1839-1906).  
 Source: "The Pancharatna Problem", A. Seshan, Sruti, June 2005 (Issue 249)

quantitative aspect of the problem in pathantara. More serious is the question of variations of dhatu and matu of the sahityas. Perhaps the Sri raga pancharatna has suffered less in this respect than the others because of its standardization by Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. Among the Trinity, Tyagaraja has suffered more than the other two because of the three major schools of disciples he had, viz., Umayalpuram, Tillaisthanam and Walajapet. Dikshitar and Syama Sastri had relatively lesser number of shishyas. The language of Dikshitar (Sanskrit) also made it difficult to tamper with his kritis. On the other hand, the colloquial Telugu influenced by the Tamil country in which Tyagaraja lived has made it possible for many to incorporate interpolations in his sahityas. As a result, musicologists have questioned the attribution of certain kritis to Tyagaraja. For example, Devakottai Narayana Iyengar told me

that in the school of Karaikkudi Sambasiva Iyer, whose prime disciple he was, *Vinayakuni* in Madhyamavati was not accepted as Tyagaraja's. One should compare it with the poetic grace of *Alakalalla* in the same raga where, when the vaggeyakara refers in the matu to the waving of the curly forelocks of Rama, the underlying rishabha in the datu also oscillates in kampita gamakam! It is this oscillation that distinguishes Madhyamavati from Sri more than the arohana and avarohana of the two. One wonders what versions of pancharatnas are sung at the Aradhana of Tyagaraja in Tiruvaiyaru. Perhaps each vidwan sings or plays on the instrument as learnt from his guru and, in the chorus or group singing, no one notices the differences!



## Vidya Shankar: A superior blend of rare scholarship

by Sivapriya Krishnan



Smt. Vidya Shankar

On 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 2010, the Carnatic Music world lost one more of its veterans with the demise of Smt. Vidya Shankar, an eminent vainika, musicologist and member of the Experts Committee of The Madras Music Academy.

Smt. Vidya Shankar, daughter of Sri C.S.Ayyar, sister of Nobel Laureate Chandrasekhar Subramaniam and niece of Sir C.V.Raman, was naturally endowed with brilliance that seemed to genetically flow in her veins.

She was as much at ease with mathematics as she was with music and wanted to master both. But her father felt that mathematics was not for "girls" and insisted that she take up music instead, a fact that she regretted even when she was 80, as quoted by her to Smt. Gowri Ramnarayan in her interview in *The Hindu* dated 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2006.

With a musical training spanning a period of 12 years, under the veteran musician Sabesha Iyer, she used to follow him on the veena. Vidya Shankar's foundation in the grammar of Carnatic Music was laid firm, thereafter helping her to hone her skills and prepare her for further learning in musicology

and music under Sri T.L. Venkatarama Iyer and Madras Sabhapati Iyer.

She pursued her education with equal passion, completing her Teachers Training Course and taught at several educational institutions including Kalakshetra. She also had the opportunity to teach musicology and Sanskrit in the Central College of Carnatic Music. Post marriage to Sri. V.S. Shankar, she got deeper into practising the art and teaching of music with the encouragement of her mother-in-law, the sibling of reformer-educationist Sister Subbulakshmi.

Vidyamma, as she was fondly called by one and all, was the epitome of knowledge, hard work, grace and will. Though born in an illustrious family, she too had to battle with certain socio-cultural values that were so much a part of being a woman, but she overcame all those with grace and self assertion. Through silent assimilation of knowledge, painstaking and diligent efforts, she became an authority in her chosen areas of work, which were music and musicology.

The several lec-dems in the Madras Music Academy, her lectures on the Melaragamalika and the 15 lecture series that she delivered at Kalpakkam for the scientists at the Atomic Energy centre on the Art and Science of Carnatic Music speaks volumes of her analytical and clear thought process. She had the rare ability of translating complex theoretical concepts with practical application and demonstrating them with ease and élan.

She was handed down many of these compositions by Syama Sastri ( the great-grandson of the composer Syama Sastry). If the kritis of Syama Sastri, Subbaraya Sastri and Annaswamy Sastri are available in a well-documented format for posterity, the singular credit undisputedly goes to the efforts of this grand lady of music. The two volumes she has produced on these kritis of the Sastri parampara, are comparable in content and quality with Subbarama Dikshitar's work, the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini, the ultimate reference for all Dikshitar kritis.

Being a vainika-gayaka, she has taken excellent care in cataloguing the songs, notating them with appropriate Gamaka markings, transliterations in both the Devanagari and the Tamil scripts and detailed translations of the

compositions. Her display of the Sruti-Vina for her lecture demonstration on 22 and additional sruti-s received much acclaim in the Music Academy in 1992.

A linguist par excellence, she communicated with ease in English, Sanskrit and Tamil. Clarity of thought, in depth understanding of concepts and musical values, well-rounded training in both the veena and vocal aspects of pure classical Carnatic music and her language skills made Vidyamma a superior blend of a thoroughbred musician-musicologist of a rare scholarship steeped in the classical idiom of music.

Scholarship and knowledge rested light on this graceful lady's shoulders. She was a good human being, with a keen sense of humour. Her support and encouragement to co-artistes would always be forthcoming, as she would, notwithstanding her age and other physical inabilities, attend all the lectures and concerts, offering valuable comments and insights. She used to encourage her students and constantly make them accompany her on the veena and patiently explain to them the theory behind the art.

Awards and honours have come by her way in recognition of her valuable offerings to the field of Classical Carnatic Music.

Vidyamma's was a life of art and science that meshed seamlessly. With her demise the Carnatic Music world is one short of a musician who breathed and lived music with self discipline, clarity, conviction, grace, humility and an indefatigable spirit.

(The author is a disciple of Smt. R. Vedavalli and holds an M.A. Music degree) □



present raga swaroopa through the various sancharas embedded in it.

- Varnams are a good aid in developing the manodharma aspects like raga alapana and swara kalpana.
- Varnams are also a reference point in the event of any controversy of usage of sancharas.

In addition some more aspects were brought in to set a different trend and present varnams in a new approach.

- The traditional varnams were composed with the sole objective of giving the learner rigorous training and in the process the sahityam in the varnam was not given much importance so much so when these varnams are rendered the listener can hardly follow and understand the sahityam. There are glaring examples of varnams in which the sahitya is incomplete. In the new varnams it is attempted to give a thematic picture, occasionally related to the raga in which it is composed. That is how many of the new varnams have raga mudra also.
- The new varnams aim to create a natural flow of the raga so that the learning of these varnams takes much less time as compared to the traditional varnams. However the new varnams also have their own characteristic sancharas which make room for rigorous practice thus accommodating the original objective of the varnams.
- The charana swaras are structured in a uniform pattern for all the varnams. An interesting aspect in the charana swaras in these new varnams is

that there is gradual emotional and tempo build-up from the first to the last swara and at times one who has an insight finds an emotional build-up relevant to the sahitya or the lyrics of the charana.

The structure of the new varnams is broadly the same as the traditional varnams, in that they contain the pallavi and anupallavi followed by the muktayi swaram in the purvanga and the charanam followed by the charana swaras in the uttaranga. The charana swaras in most of the varnams have been limited to five. The first one generally has deergha swaras, the second one has a combination of hrasva and deergha swaras but has a typical nadai different for each varnam. The third one has completely hrasvakshara swaras, the fourth one again has a combination of hrasva-deergha swaras but shows typical nadai, stretching over the entire range of the raga and finally the fifth one is elaborate with four lines of swaras showing the culmination of the raga swarupa.

Some of the other salient features of the new varnams are :

- All the varnams carry Murthy as the composer's mudra.
- About 40 varnams have 'Raga mudra' also.
- The sahityam in the new varnams has some relevance to the name of the raga and is thematic eg Rasikapriya, Kantamani, Bhavapriya, Raghupriya, Vachaspati, Kosalam etc.
- A speciality of the varnam in Yagapriya is that it is on Maharishi Vishwamitra. There

are no known compositions on Vishwamitra.

- Singing these varnams in higher speeds is easier due to their natural flow.
- The varnams have some interesting features like Atita and Anagata grahas, Anuloma-viloma prakriya, grahabheda patterns etc to name a few.

It is hoped that musicians and students will take advantage of these varnams and sing all the 72 melakartas with the ease which was eluding musicians for so many years since they were formulated. It is also hoped that the future will see many creations in the 72 melakartas and more frequent rendering of compositions in all these ragas. □

#### Form IV

(See Rule 8 of Press & Registration of Book Act)

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I, Jayaram Mani, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Interview

## Continuing Musical Journey of a Prodigy

by Nalini Dinesh

The Indian Musicological Society's conference at the NCPA, Mumbai in January 2010 had a leading Carnatic vocalist presenting a paper on an unlikely topic "Effect of temperature on the overtones produced by mridangam". It does make sense when one reads the name of the participant though-Sowmya. Sowmya is a musical prodigy with a very strong academic base in science, holding a masters degree from IIT, Madras. *Shanmukha* grabbed the opportunity of the lady's stay in Mumbai to chat with her on her musical journey:

### On her earliest musical memories :

Appa was mad about music and used to pester Amma to learn music. Every single radio concert used to be played at home and we would listen. Once when I was about two or so, I happened to identify Todi raga and Appa was astonished, because I had correctly identified the raga based on something he had said long back, and without knowing any kritis to boot. (Usually raga identification is taught/learnt using kritis/film songs with similar sounding tunes). From that time, he used to make me listen to songs, and tell me the ragas, and then ask me to identify the same raga later etc. Whenever I identified a raga correctly, he used to reward me with rice peppermint. Then I had to ask him a question. So he made it into a game. Gradually, he went onto more advanced questions based on melakarta like, what raga would result



if Shadvidhamargini's madhyamam was changed etc.

### On her tutelage under Dr. S. Ramanathan :

When I was about three, Appa attended Dr. S. Ramanathan's concert at Alwaye Sangeetha Sabha and was amazed at his effortless Poornachandrika alapana and kalpana swaram for the kriti *Palukave Meenakshi* ("Ippadi oru poornachandrikavaa, I've heard so many masters sing this raga, but never like this...."). Thatha (as I went on to call Dr. S. Ramanathan) suggested

that my father send me to him for lessons in Madras. We were living in Kerala then. I learnt from him from 1976 till the time he passed away in 1988. I used to come to Madras once a month, accompanied by my father or any relative or friend who happened to be travelling to Madras at the time. I also spent entire vacations in Madras staying with and learning from Thatha. Considering such a young age, it wasn't as if I had to be coerced into this lifestyle, because Thatha had daughters who used to play with me and there were other "wow" attractions there like the beach and the TV- we didn't have a TV set back home in Kerala. I used to enjoy watching Tamil movies on TV. Classes with Thatha were not like regular classes, he used to teach students continuously from early morning till night. He used to encourage parents to stay back, and would casually ask them to sing too, or put kalpanaswaram somewhat like PNK (the late Sri P.N. Krishnamoorthy, ex-editor of *Shanmukha* and prominent musical personality in Mumbai). In fact, PNK and Thatha were great friends, whenever he came to Mumbai he would stay with PNK.

### On Mukamma (T. Mukta, part of the sister duo Brinda-Mukta, legendary padam-javali exponents of Veena Dhanammal's lineage) :

I was twelve when I first met Mukamma. Thatha asked my father to take me to the late Sri Y.G. Parthasarathy's (prominent theatre personality in Chennai) sister Vaidehi's house, but did not elaborate on the

reason. So we landed up at the house without knowing why we were there. Later Vaidehi mami told us that Mukamma was going to take class there. When Mukamma finally arrived she asked me if I sing, I replied in the affirmative and sang something. To our amazement, she then told me to join the class. She taught *Vadiga Gopaluni* padam in Mohanam in that first class. After the class we went straight to Triplicane to Thatha's house where my father started bombarding Thatha with questions to which he calmly replied "classla serndachonno, adu than venum".

Classes with Mukamma consisted of learning compositions, there was no kalpana swaram or neraval singing, though one of my most precious memories is of Mukamma, during her last days with a failing memory, singing kalpana swaram at *O baamane* (a little tricky eduppu) in *Valapudasa* which is set to Misra Chaapu talam! Mukamma used to directly communicate with Thatha about me - if I didn't turn up for a class, she used to ask him "Adu varave illaye". She lived in such a beautiful old house in Gandhinagar, which was sadly torn down later to build a flat.

### On her scientific education and current doctoral research :

My dad set great store by education. Once, at a chamber concert in which I was singing with Mukamma, MS amma (M.S. Subbulakshmi) heard me and advised my father to stop my education and put me onto singing full time. But Appa is such a votary of education, he

used to listen to everyone who said this and nod his head, but would not take it seriously.

Music is a science, only if one looks at it that way can one realize the artistic beauty. For example I realize the beauty and uniqueness of the nishadam in Suratti, when I know the concept of the 22 shrutis.

I'm researching on finding a solution to changing shruti of mridangam in response to air-conditioning without changing any of the materials used to make the instrument. There is a general tendency among artistes to resist technology, for instance, online classes, teaching aids like CD-Roms, etc. Technology is just an aid, it will surely not replace older practices.

**On Carnatica, a pioneering institution founded by Sowmya and vocalist K.N. Shashikiran**

Shashi and I were university mates. He was always full of ideas and we found that we had a common aim, to do something in music and Shashi was sure that it had to be something to do with technology. My husband being a software engineer would also egg us on. We initially made an educational, CD ROM. We weren't business - savvy at all - for instance, we started the firm with the name Srishti and were promptly presented with a communication threatening legal action as Srishti was already a registered company! Then we restarted with the name Carnatica with premises at T. Nagar in Madras in 1998.

Initially, the activities were all education-based. We went onto creating a website and to sustain the company we started taking classes. Slowly we started making other albums and holding Carnatic music events.

Initially events were only raga appreciation sessions (titled Raganubhava). Big vidwans and younger musicians were invited to be part of a discussion panel. Discussion centered around evolution of a raga, allied ragas, compositions in the raga etc, followed by a concert entirely in that raga. As time went on, musicians started feeling that they didn't have the required pathantaram to be able to present an entire concert in a single raga. So we started having concerts with only a Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi in that raga. But then we wanted rarer compositions to be learnt and popularized. So we approached senior gurus like P.S. Narayanaswamy and Seeta Rajan to train their students on compositions in a single raga. We then had the students render these compositions along with the discussions and audience interaction followed by Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi. The discussion panel included musicians like R. Vedavalli, Sriram Parasuram, V.V. Srivatsa, T.R. Subramaniam, Rama Ravi and others. V.V. Srivatsa gave the historical context of the raga quoting from ancient texts. We had other features at these events, like a newsletter and competitions with prizes. The Raganubhava sessions became so popular that people from other cities like Bangalore started scheduling their visits to Madras according to the dates of these

sessions! On the other hand, there were discouraging factors like people refusing to pay Rs. 2/- for the newsletters!

Carnatica had many other initiatives like testing voice quality based on various parameters including how the voice sounds in a studio, with pakka vadyam etc. For people wanting to sing film music, we arranged for an orchestra. For all these initiatives, funding was a problem. Later we had Sahityanubhava sessions. Some of these were : Panchalinga kritis wherein Shri S.R. Janakiraman spoke about the musical aspect, Dr. Pappu Venugopal Rao spoke on the sahityam, and each kriti was rendered by a different artiste; in the session on Ghana raga Pancharatna kritis, Shri S.R. Janakiraman showed how taanam can be sung from the chittai swarams, Dr. Pappu Venugopal spoke on the sahityam, Smt Aruna Sairam and I sang two kritis, Malladi brothers sang two other kritis and everyone sang *Endaro Mahanubhavulu* together. We also held Vadyaanubhava sessions; the one on violin baani had sections on instrument construction, and presentations by the Lalgudi siblings, Parur brothers etc.

*Carnatica also pioneered the late-night New Year's eve musical celebrations during the December music season in Chennai in which a galaxy of musicians, old and young, veterans and newcomers participate and artistes and audiences bond.*

**On reality shows**

Youngsters today have a lot of opportunities to excel and gain timely

recognition for their excellence too. There is an abundance of talent as I have experienced during the number of television contests that I have judged. These shows are very demanding and really make the participants go through the grind. They get a chance to add to their repertoire and learn performance aspects. The recent Carnatic Idol show was a great opportunity for youngsters, with the offer of an overseas concert trip and a chance to cut an album included! Public recognition too is overwhelming due to the wide reach of TV - in fact, I have gained so much more recognition through TV than with just my live concerts!

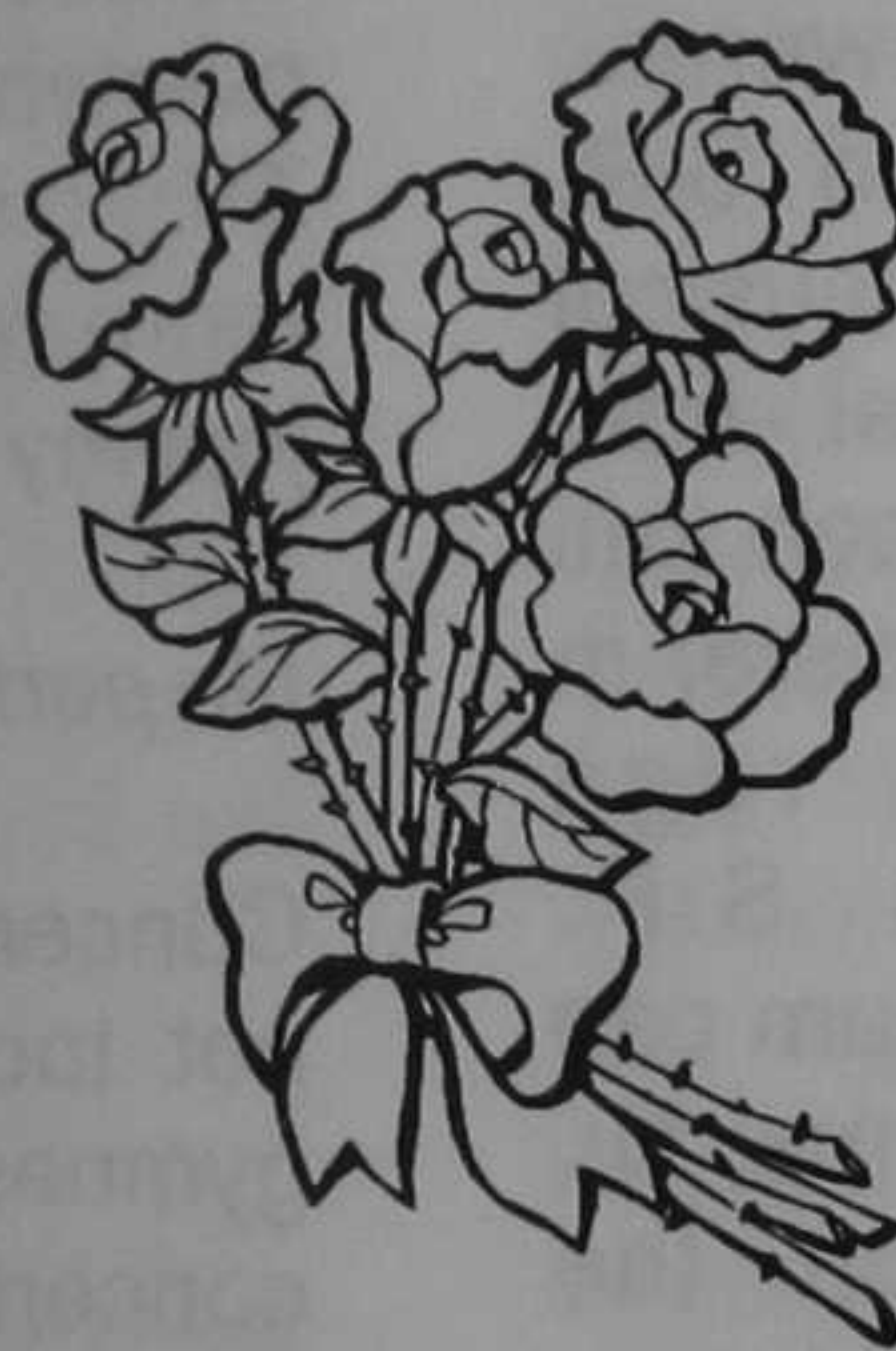
*On performance aspects :*

Concerts should be spontaneous with not too much vyavaharam (technical gymnastics). I choose items for a concert based on the current state of my voice, and not the kind of audience, though foreign audiences always tend to request for more vakra ragas like Narayanagowla and Kedaragowla and a ragam-tanam-pallavi. More often than not, I don't plan my ragam-tanam-pallavi too. It's challenging to select and render the pallavi on the spot, well yes, there are mistakes, but that's part of the game!

□

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## Building musical bridges - the Hindustani experience

by **Dr. Sakuntala Narasimhan**

29th March, 2008. The auditorium of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Mumbai, is set for the valedictory session of the three-day annual music festival of Swar Sadhna Samiti, an organization devoted to the promotion of Indian classical music. The founders, Dr Aban Mistry ( the first woman to obtain a doctorate in tabla ) and her guru , the late Keki Jijina, are both Parsis. The office bearers of the Samiti, Joint Secretaries Rupa Sethna and Feroze Katila, are also Parsis. The Samiti began in 1961 with the patronage of Kaikhuhru Navroji Kabraji, a Parsi, and



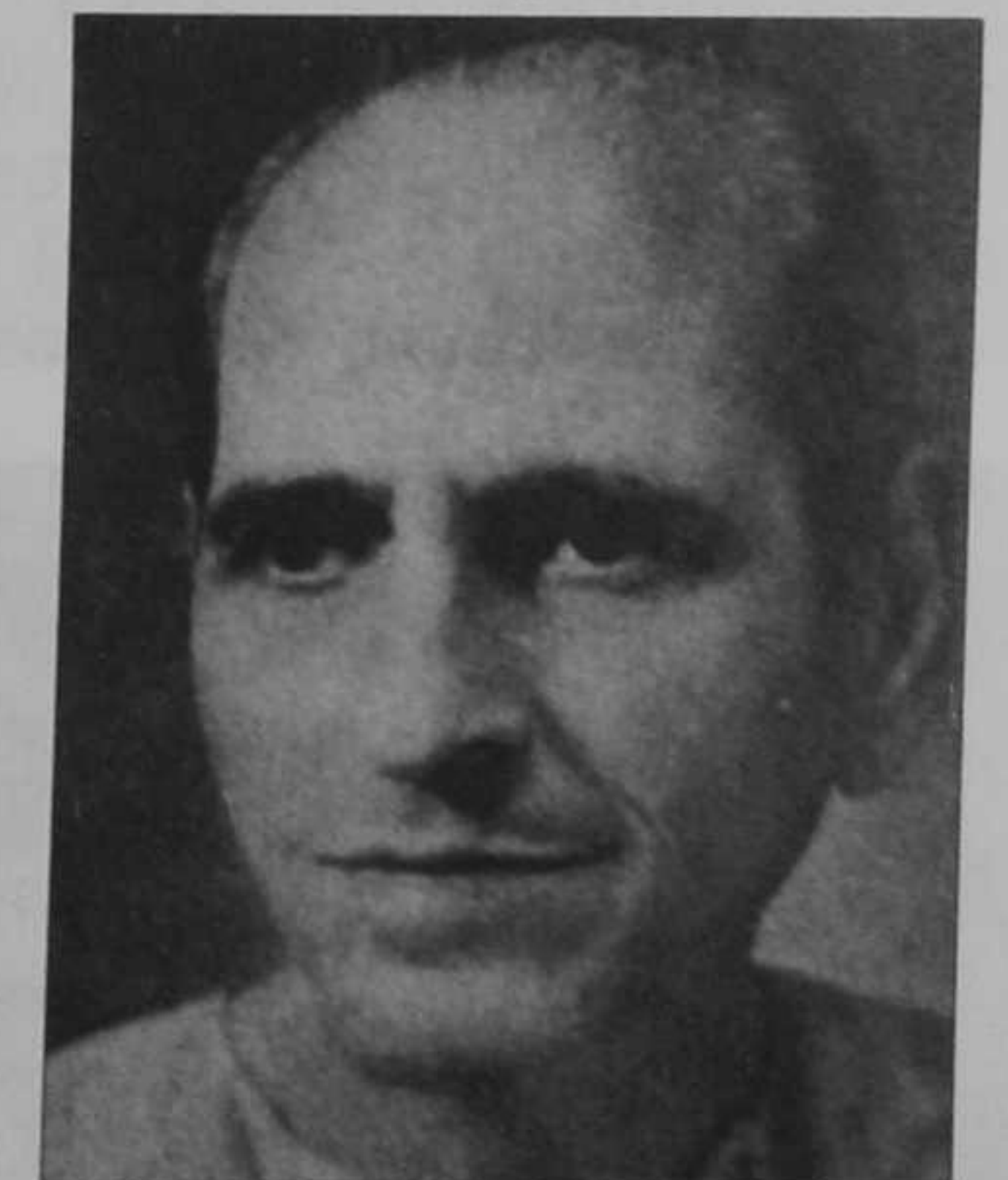
**Aban Mistry**

Dr Mistry's book on classical music begins with an invocation of the blessings of Dadar Ahura Mazda (Great God, for Parsis) but when the evening's programme begins, it is with a song in praise of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning, sung by Parsis.

This is just one example of the seamless integration that marks the Indian musical scene, with devoutly religious individuals holding their

dedication to the Muse higher than their personal religious affiliations. There is no contradiction, no raised eyebrows, no fisticuffs over alleged "hurts caused to religious sentiments". That is in politics. In the arts, there is more of linked hands across religions than of fisticuffs.

Shirin Vazifdar, who hailed from a traditional Parsi family, took to classical Indian dance forms and earned a name as a leading exponent. She danced to lyrics in praise of the Indian pantheon of Gods and divinities. Pandit Feroze Dastur , a Parsi, who was honoured with the prestigious Kalidas Samman of the Madhya Pradesh government and the Sangeet Natak Akademi award, learned classical vocal music from the legendary Sawai Gandharva of the Kirana gharana and went on to become himself one of the leading lights of that style. When he sang khayals, he was not even conscious of whether the words were in praise of Krishna or Allah. What mattered was just the music.



**Pandit Feroze Dastur**

Dr. Aban Mistry's book records how Parsis set up the Gayan Uttejak Mandali

in Mumbai for the promotion of Indian classical music in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nearly 140 years ago. Parsis are the descendants of migrants who came to western India from Persia 1230 years ago, to escape religious persecution and to safeguard their Zoroastrian faith. Over time the integration of some members of the community into the Indian cultural ethos was such that some of them set up an organization for the promotion and propagation of Hindustani classical music, even while they continued to owe allegiance to their Zoroastrian faith. When one tries to compile a list of such examples where artistic devotion transcends religion, an astonishingly long list of artistes emerges, showing how culture has always played, and continues to play, a very important bonding element in our lives.

Allauddin Khan, Ravi Shankar's guru, called himself a Brahmin (some say he even wore the sacred thread) and was so devoted to the muse that he worshipped Saraswati. The medieval composer Purandara Dasa has composed a song in Kannada in which he extols brotherhood with Muslims ("thurukaru" meaning Muslims) and encourages inter-dining with those of



Allauddin Khan

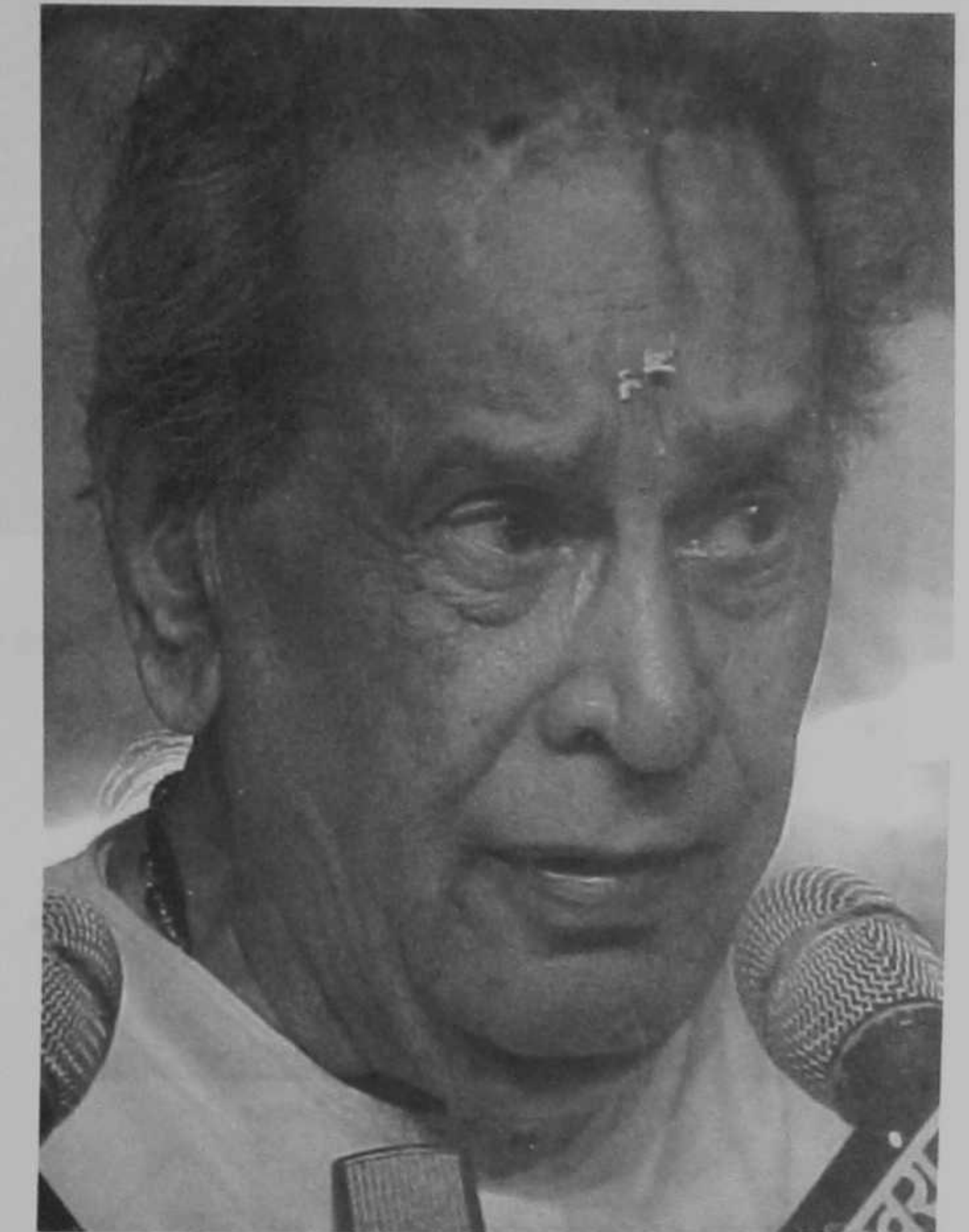
the Islamic faith. The Tamil patriot-poet Subramanya Bharati too composed a song "Allah, allah, allah" which is quite well-known. In fact, the history of Hindustani music is full of composers who sang in praise of Lord Krishna and Rama. Ustad Mushtaq Hussain Khan of Rampur gharana, who was the first musician to be chosen for the Sangeet Natak Akademi award and the Padma Bhushan in newly independent India, composed a dhrupad with the lyrics "Ramachandra Krupa nidhe" which so pleased the Muslim nawab ruler of Rampur state that he (Khan sahib) was rewarded handsomely for his effort by his princely patron. Another composer, Ras Khan, is said to have been so taken up with his devotion to Lord Krishna that he migrated to Brindavan and sang ecstatically in praise of Kanhaiya (as Krishna is fondly referred to, in the north). Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan has a large icon of Lord Nataraja in his drawing room, along with a calligraphy of a verse from the Koran at the entrance. One of the khayals he has composed is in praise of Ganapati. A composer named Rahim (obviously a Muslim) has composed several songs on "brij ke bihari" (Krishna) as has Kazi Ashraf Mahmud, who too has sung about Krishna in such lyrical terms that one is reminded of the ecstatic descriptions in Meerabai's songs. A book titled "Bhajan sangrah" (collection of bhajans) published by the Geeta Press of Gorakhpur, includes several such songs composed by Muslims on Hindu Gods. Perhaps in this sense, the north steals a march over the south, in terms of inter-religious music-making (although the Carnatic system too has examples like Sheikh Chinna Moulana, the nagaswaram player). To a greater extent than in the south, performing



Sheikh Chinna Moulana

ensembles have typically, a mix of Muslims and Hindus performing together (Zakir Hussain will accompany Shivkumar Sharma). Why go further than the popular duo of yesteryear, Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan, who performed together for decades? Artistes have always sat together, especially in Hindustani music, irrespective of religious divisions. When Bade Ghulam Ali Khan sang "Hari Om Tat Sat", audiences loved the rendition as one of his favourite items. The record of this song is still played repeatedly, over the radio, bringing nostalgic memories to music lovers. My guruji's father Ustad Rashid Ahmed Khan was such a devout Muslim that he had left instructions to his family that after his death he should be buried only at the holy Nizamuddin dargah in Delhi. His wishes were carried out when he passed away, but this same ustad also composed a beautiful Bandish ki thumri in raga Keervani in ek tal, in praise of Krishna (*Tore bina mohe chain naheen, Brij ke nand lal*, meaning I cannot be at peace without you, my beloved Krishna) a composition which Rashid Khan renders frequently in his concerts. In the reverse direction,

Bhimsen Joshi sings the famous composition *Kareem naam tero*, in Darbari Kanada, in praise of Allah. As for shehnai samrat Bismilla Khan, it is widely known that he refused to leave Varanasi because he could not contemplate being away from his beloved Kashi Vishwanath that the city is famous for. One of my favourite CDs is that of Jesudas, a Christian, singing "Swagatam Krishna".



Bhimsen Joshi

One can cite a large number of examples of both musicians and composers, who have crossed or disregarded the religious divide, without causing any flutters among audiences or communities. The 12<sup>th</sup> century female composer Lal Ded, of Kashmir, who is often compared to Meerabai because she disregarded social restrictions, has sung a song in

which she says Muslims and Hindus should be like brothers and friends. Nearly a millennium later, we seem to be in dire need of recalling such sage advice about communal harmony.

Harmony is in fact, the key word -- if we emphasise harmony (not jarring discord) in defining good music (whether of the north or the south) what is the problem in extending the concept of harmony to society as a whole? Is this perhaps one reason why we need to



Lal Ded

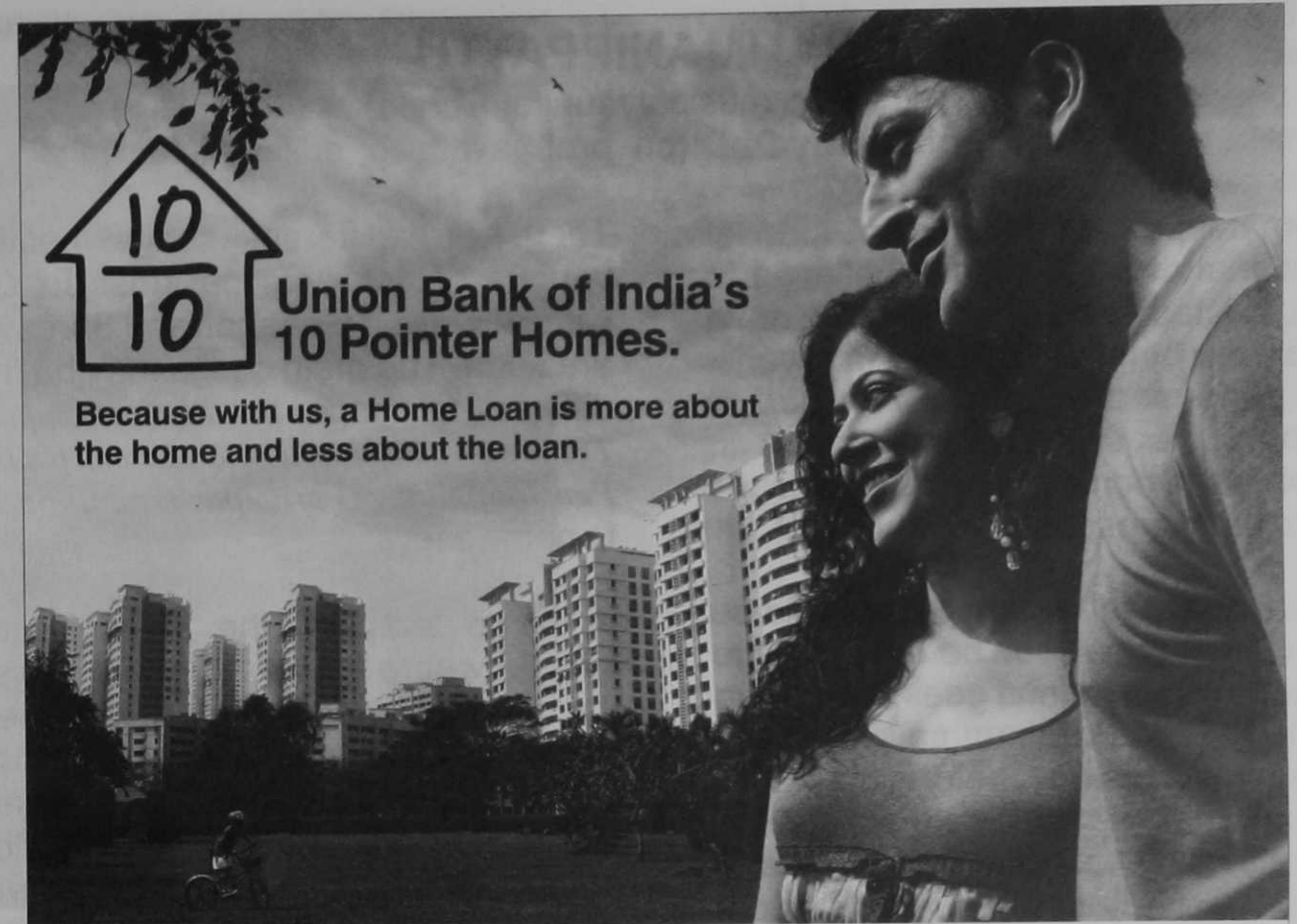
give greater importance to music as a subject in our school curricula, so that children right from a young age, learn to sing together and sing about inter-religious brotherhood? Today's curricula have no place for such "frivolous" activities as music and the arts. Science and computer education are seen as important, but those in charge of deciding educational content forget that these seemingly "frivolous" activities too imparted some very important "education" to growing generations of

citizens. Those who sing together live together in harmony. In countries of the west, music is in fact being used as a very effective means of drawing children with behavioural problems (vagabonds, rag pickers, street children, drug addicts and gangs known for violence) into the social net. This has been demonstrated particularly in south American countries like Venezuela. Jose Antonio Abreu, the man who drew inspiration from this idea, has won international recognition (including the Alternate Nobel award) for the pioneering work he has done, in terms of improving social harmony through the use of music. The band he has put together, of young street children and drifting adolescents, has become famous and is much in demand for concerts.

Pandit Paluskar used music as a powerful tool for mass patriotism during the freedom struggle (as did Subramanya Bharati of the south too). Even today, musicians of India and Pakistan perform together, and forget their political barriers once they find common aesthetics through art.

Music can build bridges where politics divides regions and people. A musician is an artiste first, a south Indian or north Indian, Hindu or Muslim or Parsi or Sikh, only second. Raga and rhythm become important, not Ram or Rahim.

When the popular saying claims that music ennobles, it was referring to the aesthetics of sound patterns, but in another, more communal sense also, perhaps, Indian music especially of the north shows that music can build bridges that span the religious divide with ease.



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## BRAHMANIPPATTU

(A unique musical ritual of Kerala)

by Dr. P.N.Prabhavathy PhD (pn\_prabhavathy@rediffmail.com)

Brahmanippattu is an ancient form of devotional music, which is believed to have existed in the temples of Kerala since even before the advent of Aryans. It is performed by *Brahmani*-s (ladies belonging to the *Nambisan* caste) in temples and homes to please the Gods and to bring prosperity.

In the early days, young girls used to be given in marriage even before their age of maturity. The legend goes that during the era of Sage Parasurama, a Brahmin girl attained puberty before marriage, making her a disqualified bride. Somehow, a groom was found, but she and her posterity were sidelined as a set of inferior Brahmins called *Nambisan*-s who made garlands for the temples and the ladies were entitled to sing at temples, marriages, homes etc in praise of the Gods and Goddesses.

The songs in Brahmanippattu are blissful and devotional with simple Malayalam lyrics. The very ancient verses (before Malayalam era 500) had an influence of Tamil also. Later the great writer Mahishamangalam (Mazhamangalam) wrote new verses in pure Malayalam and even rephrased a few older ones. There are also a few other anonymous contributors to the collection of verses.

The music of Brahmanippattu is simple with a rustic charm. The age-old tradition has withstood the ravages of time and unlike many other contemporaries it has been immune to the encroachment of Carnatic or other styles of music.

There are different songs befitting various deities or occasions. To start with, verses on Ganapati and Saraswati are sung. The main songs may be from different categories like *Bhagavatippattu*, *Tiruvonampattu*, *Uthrapattu*, *Penkotappattu*, *Perumpazhaippillippattu*, to name a few.

In some temples, the ritual is quite simple, where a lone *Brahmani* sings at the doorstep (*Sopanam*) of the deity, rhythmically tapping on a bell metal plate (*Ottukinnam*) with an iron knife. When performed on special occasions or places or at homes, the event becomes highly ritualistic and elaborate. The preparations are described as '*Panthal Varnana*' (which means describing the venue) in one of the songs itself.

A 4ft or 16ft square wooden frame is erected atop the venue. White cloth and red silk are spread over the frame supported by ropes. The edges of the frame are decorated with tender coconut leaves, mango-leaves, flowers of areca nut palm etc. and lamps are hung at corners. The number of entrances to the venue depends on the number of deities worshipped. The floor is decorated with '*Kolam*'-s (a decoration made of rice flour). The deities are adorned on *Peetham*-s (small seats) on which silk, coconuts and '*Valkkannadi*' are accordingly arranged. For Goddess Bhadrakali, a female deity that destroys evil, a sword is also placed on the side. The preparations are completed early in the day or

during the previous night of the event.



Valkkannadi

The ritual starts as the priest purifies the venue with holy water and offers *Nivedyam* (sacred food) to Lord Ganapati, Goddess Saraswati and the family deity. Starting with Ganesha *Stuti*, a chorus of *Brahmani*-s start singing the various songs in order of preference. This may vary between places and deities. During elaborate performances, instruments like *Edakka*, *Chenda*, *Maddalam* (all percussion instruments), *Kombu*, *Kuzhal* (wind instruments), *Ilathalam* (cymbal) etc appear as accompaniments. They are also played while installing the deity at the venue.

In *Bhagavatippattu*, various songs on Durga, Kali and Parvathi are sung. The whole event can take a complete day with morning, noon and late evening sessions. The musical sessions are studded with many rituals including the unique '*Ponguridi*'. This is a prayerful

pounding of turmeric, mango leaves, tender coconut leaves etc. soaked in '*Guruthi*' (a mixture of turmeric and slaked lime) using a heavy wooden rod called '*Ulakka*'. The spray of red on all bystanders during this event resembles the joyful '*Holi*' of North India. Different songs depicting the birth of Kali, her victory over demons and a few verses on other relevant deities are recited. Each session or '*Mada*' offers various '*Nivedyam*-s' like *Appam*, *Malar*, bananas etc. to the Gods.

*Bhagavatippattu* concludes in the late evening where certain verses are sung to the Goddess as farewell. But once again, 'the return of Kali' is chanted, perhaps signifying her eternal presence and blessings to the crowd. Finally, the priest ends the *pooja*-s and removes the sword and '*Valkkannadi*'.

There are other songs in *Brahmanippattu* conducted by devotees for different prayers and wishes. *Tiruvonampattu* is a harvest song to bring prosperity and for the well-being of the girls in the family in future. *Uthrapattu* is celebrated in Saastha or Ayyappa temples to glorify the birth of the Lord. (*Uthram* being the birth star day of the Lord). *Penkodappattu* is a marriage melody to be sung at homes. *Perumbazhaippillypattu* is performed with regularity by ladies in prayer for '*Nedumangalyam*' (longevity of their married life).

Studies have shown the encroachment of Carnatic music into *Sopana Sangitam* traditions of Kerala which had maintained an individual identity till late. Formal training in classical music by young artists has facilitated this change. It is a historical fact that some formal efforts have taken place in

*Kathakali, Krshnanattam* etc in the name of 'Sangita Suddheekaranam' (purification) whereby *alapana* styles of artistes have been "corrected" by authorities with the help of Carnatic musicians. The musical style of Brahmanippattu is an exception to this and almost virgin. Some experts have even noted parallels between Brahmanippattu and the Vedic chanting style of Kerala.

Brahmanippattu is an endangered entity with few artistes and fewer experts. Much of the significance and intricate details of rituals have been lost while being passed on through generations.

Thekkeppattath Savithri Brahmani Amma is the oldest artist (92 years) and the singular surviving authority in this art. She is also an 'A'-grade performer at All India Radio and Doordarshan. Almost blind by

age, she still dips in the pond and reports for duty at the famous Bharatha Temple (Sri Koodalmanikkam) at Irinjalakuda, Thrissur district. She was trained in this art by her mother-in-law at the tender age of 14 and still possesses the 'Thaliyola' (palm manuscript) of Brahmanippattu. She is the performing artiste in most of the temples in Malabar.

Amidst changing times and concept in music and art, Brahmanippattu stands apart like a taproot taking us deep into history while new branches and flowers



Thekkeppattath Savithri Brahmani Amma

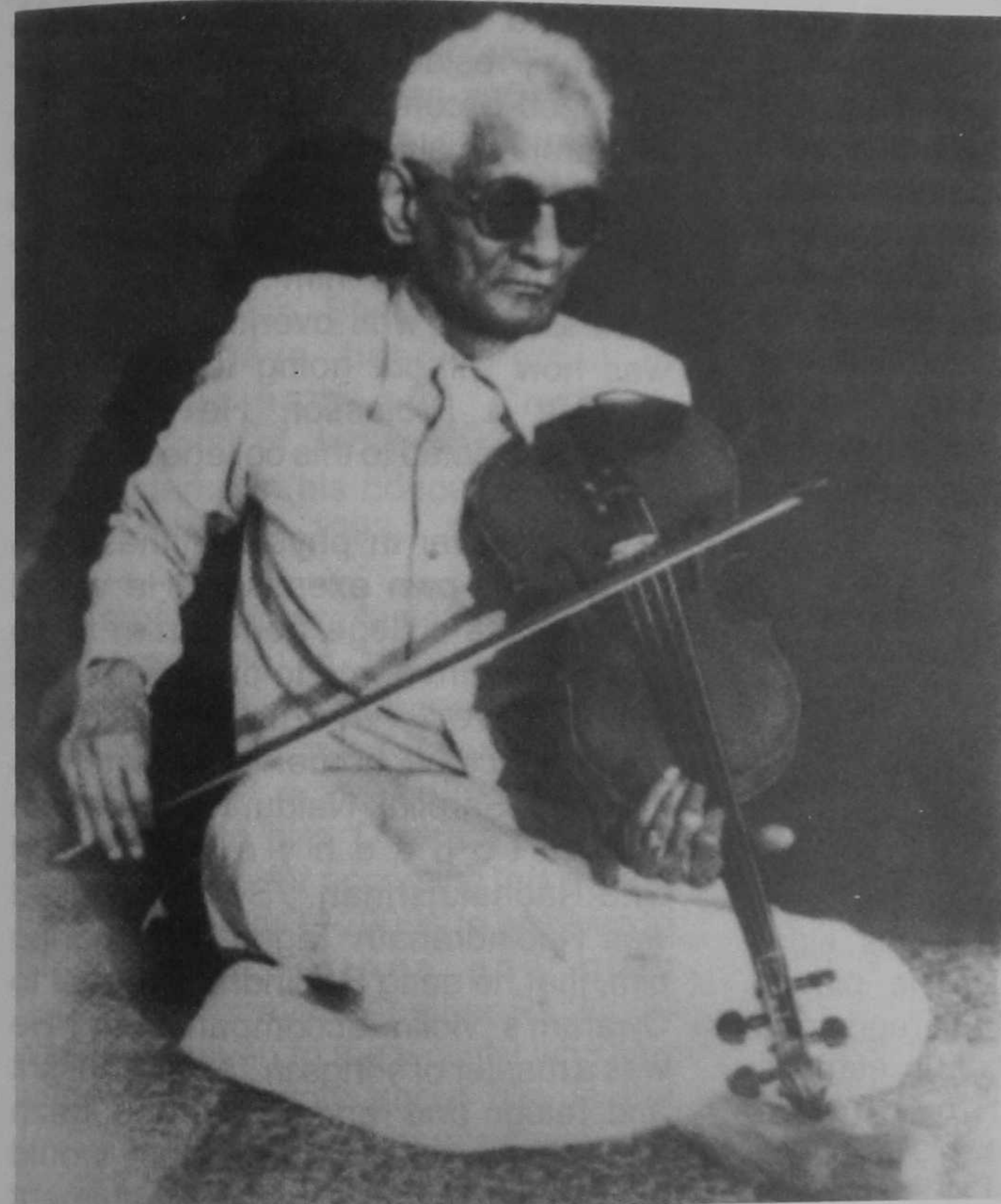


Savithri Brahmaniamma on daily duty

keep sprouting daily on our tree of culture. It also symbolizes the feminine significance appreciated in old days among the otherwise masculine prejudices about rituals and priesthood. □

## A TRIBUTE TO DWARAM VENKATASWAMY NAIDU

by P. P. Ramachandran



Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu

Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu, affectionately called Dwaramgaru or Naidugaru was born on Deepavali day in Bangalore on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1893 and was raised in Vishakhapatnam. His grandfather and father were proud of their military background both having been in charge of a garrison in Bangalore. The family shifted later to Vishakhapatnam. Dwaram was appointed professor of violin in the Maharaja's Music College in

Vizianagaram, at the young age of 26, and became its principal in 1936. He was the first one to start violin solo concerts. His first solo concert was given in Vellore in 1938. He cautioned his disciples against missing practice even for a day, "If you don't practice for one day, you will notice your mistakes, if you don't practice for two days the audience would notice your mistakes!"

Dwaram was a quiet genius. His music sparkles of sublime beauty and grace. His music is a stream of fresh

melody, in a world obsessed with rhythmic emphasis. SVK, Shri Krishnamurthy of *The Hindu* - a famous music critic remarks - "The hallmark of Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu's violin is that he soared to the very pinnacle of melodic excellence with the minimum use of technical paraphernalia. His style was stately, reposeful and abounded in tonal mellifluousness". Dwaram sculpted the raga with a beautiful form in mind. He attempted to create an elegant raga,

without indulging in 'body-building exercises' in the scale. His goal was an innately handsome raga. A Dwaram piece stays in your active memory for a long time. He had this innate knack of letting his music ruminate in the minds of his listeners. That is a rare virtue. At a higher level, he was a true *nadopasaka*. Dwaram's music is a sensitive reminder that truly great music utilises the technical apparatus to achieve a greater goal - to take the listener to a plane of sheer aesthetic bliss. He does just that and effortlessly, like a mother's lullaby to her irate child.

Dwaramgaru was one of the greatest violin players of the country. His contemporaries were Rajamanikkam Pillai, Papa Venkataramiah and T.Chowdiah and he was considered senior among them. He was the most famous violinist from the state of Andhra. The family had bhajan sessions and though he had a good voice he was attracted by his elder brother's violin on which he played secretly. His brother did not reprimand him but gave him lessons in earnest. He began his schooling in Vishakhapatnam where his extreme near-sightedness almost to the level of blindness troubled him and an unsympathetic teacher made his life miserable. His grandfather withdrew him from school and he was tutored at home. This school, the Anglo Vernacular School which later became the Mrs AVN College and subsequently the Hindu College, proudly proclaimed Dwaram as its alumnus. At a concert years later, the teacher who had insulted him was so moved by his performance that he came up to him begging for his pardon.

Dwaram gave mini recitals in the

neighbourhood. In 1919 Dwaram enrolled in the Maharaja's College in Vizianagaram, the only college that offered a degree in Music in entire Madras Presidency. An eminent lawyer arranged a concert of Dwaram at the Maharaja's palace. The Maharaja and the Principal of the College were so impressed by Dwaram's performance that they offered him the post of a Professor. He was overjoyed and this was how without going to school he became a Professor. He remained totally dedicated to this college.

A firm believer in physical fitness, he devised his own exercises. He would teach at the college from 8 a.m to 10 a.m and return home to practice on the violin. Every evening he gave performances at home. His listeners included Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. So impressed was Rabindranath Tagore on hearing him, that he sang Rabindra Sangeet to Dwaram's violin accompaniment. He was a master of songs in Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu and rendered Tiruppugazh and Thevarams. Flute Mali would practice to Dwaram's accompaniment on the kanjira or violin. Later Dwaram's daughter Mangatayaru became a regular accompanist for Mali.

In 1927 Dwaram performed at the All-India Music Conference held in Madras along with the political Congress session. He became a roaring success and gramophone companies made him fabulous offers and shortly the entire country was flooded with his 78 rpm discs. Honours were showered on Dwaram. The Mysore Darbar in 1946 decorated him with the title

"Sangeetha Ratnakara". The Andhra University conferred on him the honorary doctorate "Kalaprapurna" in 1950. He received the President's award for Carnatic instrumental music in 1953. In 1957 he was awarded the "Padma Sri". He was conferred the Sangitha Kalanidhi by the Madras Music Academy in 1941. The courts of Mysore and Travancore made him Asthana Vidwan. Statues of this great musician have been erected in Visakhapatnam and Chennai. Government of India has issued a postal stamp in his honour in his birth centenary year—1993.

One story which reveals his nobility is worth recalling. In 1948 a Sammana Mahotsavam was arranged for him in Madras by Raju, a legislator. A purse of Rs.35,000/- was collected and presented to him. Dwaram laid down two conditions for accepting this award. First he wanted Rs 2000/- to be given to his elder brother and guru Venkatakrishnayya. Another Rs 2000/- was to be given to the violinist who had written damagingly about him in the 1920s. With the balance amount he bought a house near Parthasarathy temple, Triplicane. His daughter continues to live there today.

I shall conclude with a poignant story about two great violinists. During the 1954 visit of Yehudi Menuhin, Dwaram attended his performance with Justice Rajamannar. After the programme the judge took Dwaram backstage and introduced him to Menuhin. Dwaram with his fascination for European violins wanted to touch Menuhin's instrument. But the latter would not agree. Rajamannar was upset and arranged a concert the very next evening by

Dwaram and invited Menuhin. At the end of the performance, Menuhin was so amazed at Dwaram's mastery that he walked up to him, took him by the hand and apologized for the brusqueness of the previous day. Dwaram was not only allowed to touch Menuhin's violin but also play to his heart's content.

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1964, the day he was given the Andhra Pradesh Sangeeth Natak Akademi Award he was unwell but he played on the violin after accepting the award. That same night he died of heart attack. What better end can a lover of music expect and achieve?

Dwaram loved cigars. He insisted on immaculate white and perfectly-ironed clothes. He would arrange to get perfumes from Lucknow. He had a wonderful set of walking sticks and owned a rich collection of gramophone records of Carnatic, Hindustani and Western classical music. Dwaram was so fond of his grandchildren that he would stun them with difficult feats on the violin and get them to dance to folk tunes. When they laughed he would reproduce their laughter on the violin. He would suspend his violin from his collar behind his back and keeping the bow behind would play that way.

A great musician, a great man and a great human being.

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Book Review

**Bagavather His Life and Times**

Suresh Balakrishnan  
 Publisher : Mrs Sumithra Balakrishnan,  
 Po. Box No. 2462, R A Puram,  
 Chennai - 600028,  
 514 pages, Rs 495

by P.R. Mohun



First of all, we music lovers should thank Mr Suresh Balakrishnan for bringing out a book on M.K.Thyagaraja Bagavather and his times-something which is direly needed, because, there has never been one in all these 50 years since Bagavather breathed his last, really a shame. This has been redressed by Mr Suresh to a large extent. There have been a couple of books on Bagavather, but they are in Tamil, and are not so comprehensive as Mr Suresh's tome which has also got many rare photographs. This is a veritable encyclopaedia on Bagavather, a treat for all Bagavather fans, and also for music lovers at large.

The book is of 3 parts. The first one is about the making of M.K.Thyagaraja Bagavather and also about the period in

which Bagavather blossomed. The second part is about the time when this once in a blue moon blossom was execrably trampled upon, when it was going to radiate its splendour and emit its fragrance for more time. The curtailment of Bagavather's peak period can be compared to the curtailment of Sir Donald Bradman's career due to World War 2, but, unlike Bradman, the blow on Bagavather was really tragic because, it not only affected Bagavather's career but it was also a veritable lightning strike on Bagavather in every way. The third part of the book is about Bagavather's post-trauma life, which is the last dozen years of his life.

The first part is of course the most enjoyable for Bagavather lovers. The

author starts off at a nice tempo without making the reader think about the 500 pages to travel. Importantly, Mr Suresh has put the technical aspects of Carnatic music in the simplest way possible and also in the least measure possible. He has struck an ideal balance that is appropriate for a book for all kinds of readers. The ragas of all Bagavather film songs have been given, which is indispensable for a beginner. The reader also gets a strong flavour of the era in which Bagavather rocketed to fame and glory.

Mr Suresh's great service to Bagavather is: he has cleared so many misconceptions about him, and he has also established M.K.Thyagaraja Bagavather as a very great human being. Unfortunately this facet of Bagavather's personality is hardly known. Gifted people can also be great souls-that is what Bagavather has demonstrated. Bagavather and misinformation are inseparable from each other. And this feature seems to continue even after Bagavather's demise. It was only with trepidation that I started reading the 3rd part of the book, because, I had been told that Bagavather's post-prison life had been replete with misery. No doubt Bagavather's heyday as a film star was over after his acquittal, but not his career as a singer. It had continued to flourish. Bagavather's last few years were not really good, but that was largely his own making, for which fate cannot be blamed. That is what we come to know from Mr Suresh's book.

Suresh Balakrishnan has painstakingly established the fact that

M.K.Thyagaraja Bagavather was not just a semi-classical singer, but had been a consummate classical musician. This is another great tribute which Mr Suresh pays to Bagavather, because, it is glibly being said that Bagavather could not handle classical music. But the ultimate proof for Bagavather's prowess in classical music, which is his recordings, does not seem to exist. Numerous writers in the West who dwell on the great mysteries on this planet, as also 'Ripley's believe it or not' series, should include the non-availability of the recordings of Bagavather's concerts, as yet another big mystery. More importantly, why Bagavather had not cut records for all his film songs, is a multi-million dollar mystery. Compared to the volume of songs in his movie releases, the number of songs that had been released as 78 rpm records is very limited. Why have Bagavather, whose golden voice had enchanted the classes and masses alike, and recording companies too, greatly deprived his fans by failing to use the boon of man's technology? If Bagavather had rendered his songs as records, then the royalty from those records would have eased his financial situation towards the end of his life. Even after coming out of prison it could have been done. Surprisingly, Mr Suresh does not seem to be intrigued by this fact.

The 2nd part of Mr Suresh Balakrishnan's book, that is, 'The Lakshmikanthan murder case'(LMC), is highly disappointing. LMC is what I was greatly looking forward to. Mr Suresh has largely reproduced the court arguments. Well, this would suit a law

journal or a law book or even a writing which is exclusively about the 'LMC', but it is a big misfit for a book on Bagavather, because, the book is going to be read mainly by lay readers, for whom the motivation to read the exact court arguments would be very less. I'm sure many would only flip through those pages because it is a bit heavy and also uninteresting. 'M.K.Thyagaraja Bagavather and N.S.Krishnan had nothing to do with Lakshmikanthan's murder'- this is the widely held view, and so also Mr Suresh's view. This truth should have been demonstrated by Mr Suresh to his readers by taking the relevant points from the case. Some complete reports, like V.L.Ethiraj's arguments, are really worth a place in the book, but not all and sundry like for example, K.M.Munshi's inquiry as to how Lakshmikanthan's rickshaw got toppled. In this regard, comparison with Randor Guy's writings on the

'LMC' is inevitable. Not only has Randor Guy succeeded in keeping his readers riveted to the 'LMC' with his racy pen, but has also brought forth the absurdities based on which that horrendous judgement was given. Mr Suresh should have taken a leaf out of Randor Guy's newsprint. There are a few typos and lapses in the text. This is most probably due to Mr Suresh Balakrishnan's hurry to release the book for Bagavather's birth anniversary.

**Copies of the book can be ordered at the following address :**

PB No.2462,  
RA Puram, Chennai - 600028

e-mail: catch.suresh@yahoo.com

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## READERSPEAK

The tribute to departed musician-painter S.Rajam by Rohini Venkatachalam and Nalini Dinesh's article on Vijayalakshmi Subramaniam's fond memories of her teacher in January-March 2010 issue were quite interesting. Rajam was both a painter and dedicated music teacher. His line drawings of music masters looked live. He used to do illustrations for a spiritual magazine "Tattvaloka" of which I was associate editor in 1987 and 1988. His pictures of the deities had great appeal.

Rohini has detailed the great qualities of her guru. Vijayalakshmi has recalled his long stint in AIR as music supervisor when he could enrich his knowledge. Her piece is indeed "a reverential reflection of a life well-lived". An inspiring personality was S. Rajam.

*N. Hariharan,  
Senior Journalist & Ex-Music Critic, The  
Times of India, Bombay.*

## R.S. MANI CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

The centenary year of late **R.S. Mani**, co-founder and first Chairman of Board of Trustees of the sabha, will be celebrated on **4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2010**. The celebrations include a commemoration function and the vocal recitals of **Ranjani-Gayatri** and **Bombay Jayashri Ramnath**, both artistes of Mumbai origin.

## BEST TEACHER AWARD

The **M.S. Subbulakshmi Best Teacher Award** will be conferred on **Dr. Kanak Rele**, veteran Mohiniyattam exponent and founder of the Nalanda Dance Research Centre and Nalanda Nritya Kala Mahavidyalaya, Mumbai on **16<sup>th</sup> September 2010**.

## SABHA ROUNDUP

Here's a report on the sabha concerts in the last quarter :

**Vijayalakshmi Subramanyam (vocal) on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2010, Pakkala Ramadas (violin), K.V. Gopalakrishnan (mrudangam) and Adambakkam Shankar (ghatam)**



It was a pleasant concert with very few mistakes, if any, very competent neraval and kalpana swarams (notably in the Shyama Shastri kriti *Kaamaakshi* in Varaali raga) and neat RTP. Kharaharapriya alapana (the kriti was *Rama Nee Samaanam Evaru*) was rather pedestrian, but the RTP made up for it. The RTP had the sahitya *Hanumate Bhagavate Namaste Sada Manasa* in Ranjani set to Khanda jathi Jampa Talam with kalpana swaras in Begada, Bowli, Hindolam and Suratti. The transition between ragas was smooth and aesthetic. The viruttam on Karpagambal (consort of Shiva in the Kapaleeswarar temple in Chennai) had beautiful soul-stirring lyrics and was rendered well in Saveri, Valaji and Behag, followed by the Papanasam Sivan composition *Karpagambikai Nee Allavo*.

**K. Gayatri (vocal) on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2010, S.P. Ananthapadmanabhan (violin), Delhi Sairam (mrudangam)**



K. Gayatri's concert was slightly jarring despite her excellent voice and technical competence. The artiste's preoccupation with pulling off sangati-laya patterns in collusion with her accompanists compromises her involvement in rendition and expression of bhava. The sub-main piece was Papanasam Sivan's *Varamu kriti Thunai purindarul* and the main piece was *Shri Chandrashekhara yateendram* composed by N.S. Ramachandran in Shankarabharanam, Khanda Triputa talam. RTP was in *Simhendramadhya mam*. *Simhendradhyamam* alapana was disappointing and often rang of Keeravani.

**M.S. Sheela (vocal) on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2010, Mysore Shrikanth (violin), Anoor Ananthakrishna Sharma (mrudangam), Guru Prasanna (kanjira)**



The senior vocalist gave a very well-planned, satisfying recital. Some highlights were *Shri Shankara Gurusvaram* in Nagaswaravali, *Amba Vaani Nannu* in Keeravani, *Narada Vedalina* in Pantuvarali with nice kalpanaswarams, *Singara Velavan Vandaan* in Ananda Bhairavi which was rendered very well except for the distraction of referring to notes, Swati Tirunal's Mukhari kriti *Pahi Sada Padmanabha* preceded by a chaste Mukhari alapana and a Jayachamaraja Wodeyar kriti *Kamakshi Pahimam Meenakshi* in a rare raga called Shiva Kambhoji, janya of Hari Kambhoji (sgmps, snpmgrs). The main item was the Dikshitar kriti *Akshayalinga Vibho* in raga Shankarabharanam set to Misra Chapu talam. Neraval at *Badarivana Moola* which is three counts from samam was flawless.

**Sriram Gangadharan (vocal) on 9th May 2010, H.N. Bhaskar (violin), U.Jayachandra (mrudangam), S.C. Sekhar (ghatam)**



Sriram Gangadharan's concert rocked. That's the only word to describe the blitzkrieg of improvisation that was the delight of Bhaskar and Jayachandra and a group of elder rasikas who were almost on their feet with furiously shaking heads and hands tapping out the talam. Well, not that the concert was lacking a lot on the bhava front either,

*Kaarubaaru* in Mukhaari was rendered with a lot of feeling (maybe with some over-emphasis actually). Pantuvaraali and Mukhari presented themselves again on this evening after the previous day's fare presented by M.S. Sheela. This time it was *Enna Gaanu Rama Bhajana* with alapana and kalpana swaras. Sriram wisely chose to present a relatively smaller Kambhoji kriti *Maragatavalleem* to make space for a leisurely RTP in Kalyani. Sriram strove to innovate on his alapanas with good result. In summary, a lively evening, we do need all kinds of styles don't we!

*Nalini Dinesh*

**E. Gayatri (veena) on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2010, Trichur C. Narendran (mrudangam), B.S. Purushothaman (kanjira)**



The veena concert by E. Gayatri was serene and dignified. The consummate ease, with which she played, is testimony to the years of practice Gayatri has put in, since she took the world by storm as a 9 year old prodigy. She began with a lilting varnam in Lalita followed by a brief essay of Manirangu for Swati Tirunal's *Jaya Jaya Padmanabha*. *Shankari Neeve* was prefaced with Begada raga alapana, followed by the Salagabhairavi kriti

*Samagana lola* with neraval and sparkling kalpana swarams. Dikshitar's Dharmavathi kriti *Parandhamavati* had an evocative raga delineation, neraval and kalpana swaram. *Gitarthamu* in Suratti was followed by a detailed Todi alapana and Shyama Shastri's kriti *Ninne nammi naanu* with neraval and kalpana swaram. RTP was in Kantamani. Gayatri created a lovely portrait of Kantamani such that one never felt the strangeness of the vivaadi swara, namely shuddha nishadam. She played a ragamalika tanam consisting of Amritavarshini, Brindavani, Kalyanavasantam and Poorvikalyani. Tani avartanam by Trichur Narendran & Purushothaman was highly appreciated. *Himagiri Tanaye*, the ragamalika song- *Vadavarayai*, *Eppadi padinaro* in Karnataka Devagandhari, a Kavadi chindu, *Bhajabhaja manasa* in Sindhu bhairavi, *Nagumomu galavani* in Madhyamavathi and *Katrinile varum geetham* delighted the rasikas. Her pleasant smile and unassuming demeanour added to the charm of the concert.

*Jyothi Mohan*

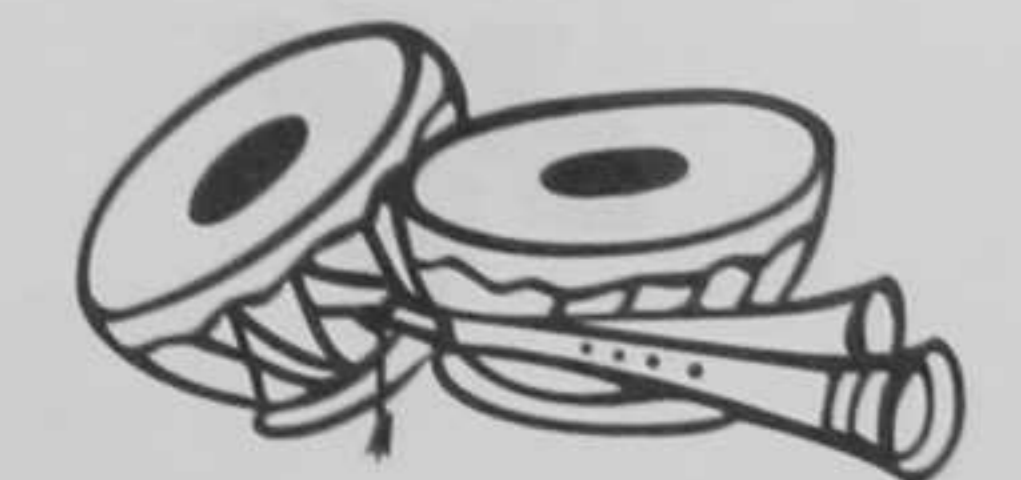
**P. Unnikrishnan (vocal) on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2010, Vittal Ramamurthy (violin), Tiruvarur M. Bhakthavatsalam (mrudangam), Tripunithura N. Radhakrishnan (ghatam)**



Hearing Unnikrishnan's hoarse voice and the rasping sound every time he took a breath in his singing, we, in the audience were anxious as to how he was going to last out the three hours, flogging a tired horse as he was. As the minutes wore on, it seemed that his ample concert and film experience was holding him in good stead and indeed, he must have dealt many a time with a throat that was acting up. It was quite fascinating to see him repeatedly foray into the upper octaves when one would have thought he would play it safe in the lower ones, maybe it helps the voice open up? It was a high quality concert experience that evening. There was a series of melakarta compositions, Todi varnam *Era Naapai*, *Sugunamule* in Chakravaakam, *Karuna Elagante* in Varaali (with neraval at *Paramatmudu Jeevatmudu*) and *Ada Modi Galade* in Charukesi before it was relieved by *Paavanaguru* in Hamsanandi and a beautiful Swati Tirunal kriti *Maamava Jagadeeshwara* in Saraswati Manohari. Charukesi alapana had interesting phrases. The RTP was in Kalyani set to Khanda Triputa talam with the sahityam *Sri Raamam Ravikulabधि somam Sujana Manobhiraamam*. There was a brilliant tani avartanam by the percussionists lasting 27 minutes - the variety of sounds that emanated from the mrudangam, cajoled by the veteran's fingers, was truly amazing.

*Nalini Dinesh*

□



## HAPPENINGS AT THE VIDYALAYA

by Nalini Dinesh

SWATI TIRUNAL DAY 17th April 2010



Geetha Ranganathan(vocal)  
accompanied by Pranav Natarajan  
on violin and Sriram Rajan on mrudangam

Narayanan Namboodiri &  
Aparna Narayanan(vocal)  
accompanied by Pranav Natarajan  
on violin and Sriram Rajan on mrudangam

The first performer of the evening, Geetha Ranganathan, began with *Gajananam*, a shloka rendered in Hamsadhvani ragam, followed by the Mayamalavagowla kriti *Deva Deva Kalayamite*. Her Pantuvaraali (for the kriti *Saarsaaksha*) and Hindolam (for the kriti *Padmanabha Paahi*) alapanas were good. Her rendition of *Gopalaka Paahimaam* set to Misra Chapu was rather loose in terms of talam. She concluded her recital with a Sindhubhairavi kriti *Ramachandra Prabho*. Geetha has a good voice, though shruti alignment has scope for improvement.

The husband-wife team of Narayanan Namboodiri and Aparna Narayanan made an excellent impression in the two compositions they rendered together namely, the first item *Kamajanaka* in Gowla and the last item, tillana in Dhanashri ragam. The other items were rendered by Narayanan alone. The Mohanam kriti *Paripaahimaam* was rendered very well. The rendition of the beautiful Kurunji padam *Aliveni* lacked depth. Narayanan has a powerful voice, with the flexibility to render fast phrases with ease. But many of them lack clarity and turn out to be loose, more sadhakam should iron out this problem.

Pranav Natarajan supported the vocalists on the violin and Sriram Rajan on the mrudangam.

The Vidyalaya was closed for summer vacation from 1<sup>st</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010.



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